University of Alberta

The Art of MEMORIA: Vico, Bacon, and the Frontispiece to the *New Science*

by

Timothy D. Harfield ©

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ABSTRACT

This treatise aims at a reading of the frontispiece to Vico's *New Science*, not as a work in the Art of Memory tradition as is most often argued, but as a critique of the assumptions about human nature that would make such an art possible. After establishing Vico's relationship to Bacon as one characterized by a pattern of correction and repetition, it discusses their respective views on the faculty of memory. Finding in Vico a strong suspicion of artificial memory, it returns to the frontispiece which, as a memory aid, would seem to contradict his claims elsewhere. This tension is resolved, however, through a recognition that Vico uses Bacon's art of memory to construct his frontispiece in such a way as to ultimately criticize the art of memory, and give birth to the reader's natural capacity for imagination and invention.

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First, I would like to thank Doug Aoki, under whose guidance this project first took shape. Although now in a form barely recognizable in light of its original conception, it still maintains certain traces of post-structuralist thought, which I intend to pick up in greater detail in the near-distant future.

Second, I wish to extend my sincerest gratitude to my advisor Ray Morrow, who, in his wisdom, was able to see the promise in what was originally but a philosophical fragment. In spite of my early resistance, I have been inspired by Ray's grasp of the Western Philosophical canon, and hope that this might be a vital first step toward achieving such a mastery myself. To Ros Sydie I also owe great thanks, for, as if by providence, offering prudent advice and support when I needed it the most. For her words, "its only a thesis," which echoed in my ears throughout the writing process, I am exceedingly grateful.

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To Dawn,

Lest we Forget.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the first translation of his work into English by Bergin and Fisch in the late 1940's, and in large part due to the promotional efforts of Giorgio Tagliacozzo, the Anglo-American philosophical tradition has seen a relatively recent explosion of interest in Giambattista Vico. In spite of his steadily increasing popularity, however, Vico's continued marginality with respect to the canon of social thought is evident from a reticence among scholars, and a need to justify their research by giving an account of the reasons for Vico's neglect. Isaiah Berlin, for example, begins his well-known essay "The Philosophical Ideas of Giambattista Vico" with this observation:

> Vico's life and fate provide perhaps the best of all known examples of what is too often dismissed as romantic fiction—the story of a man of original genius, born before his time, forced to struggle in poverty and illness, misunderstood and largely neglected in his lifetime and (save among a handful of Neapolitan jurists) all but forgotten after his death.[1]

Indeed, Vico's marginality during his own lifetime is well established. Born in Naples in 1668, Vico's origins were humble yet not unremarkable. Although born in what Nicolini has described as a *bugigattolo*[2] (a closet or windowless hovel), Vico was fortuitously born to a father who had, in a single generation, moved from a family of illiterate farmers to Naples where educated himself and opened a small bookshop. As Verene remarks,

> Although Vico was of an upright family, his origins were humble and undistinguished in a society that was hierarchically ordered and in which to rise in academic, civil, or political life, name and family connections, if not also a certain wealth, usually meant everything. For Vico to have become well educated and have a career at all is remarkable and perhaps represents an absorption of the enterprising spirit of his father.[3]

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[1] Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 21.

[2] Giambattista Vico, *Opere*, ed. Fausto Nicolini (Milan: Ricciardi, 1953), 99.

[3] Donald Phillip Verene, *The New Art of Autobiography: An Essay on the "Life of Giambattista Vico, Written by Himself"* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 7.

Growing up in his father's bookstore afforded Vico an exposure to a world of letters that he otherwise would not have known, but it also gave Vico access to libraries of other wealthy and learned men in Naples,[4] an access that facilitated his precocious need for self-education. In spite of his ambition and success in elevating himself above the humility of his origins, however, Vico nevertheless encountered professional resistance throughout his career, as was evidenced most strikingly when, upon delivering a speech in application for the position of head morning lecturer at the University of Naples, Vico felt it prudent to withdrew from the competition, learning that the position had already been given to someone else for political reasons.[5] Furthermore, although praised by theologian Jean Le Clerc for his *On the One Principle and the One End of Universal Law*, and *On the Constancy of the Jurisprudent*,[6] neither the "small literary works," nor the *first New Science* that Vico sent to Newton were acknowledged.[7] In perhaps the most depressing summary of Vico's life, a description so pathetic as to justify being quoted at length, Anthony Grafton writes that Vico

> Lived the life of an obscure—a very obscure—academic. His modest professorship of rhetoric paid only one-sixth as much as the professorship of law that he failed to win. He treasured every reference to his books in the foreign journals that could bring his name and ideas to a European public. But these were few, and some were negative. At home in Naples he walked the crowded streets in misery, avoiding the gaze of the acquaintances who failed to acknowledge the copies of his works that he sent to them. He never managed to travel abroad—not even to Rome, to the unravelling of whose history he devoted much of his life. Even his

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[4] In his *Autobiography*, Vico provides an account of how, after tiring of his studies under con Francesco Verde, he begged his father to acquire a volume from a client, whereupon Vico was referred to Nicola Maria who not only gave it outright, not also another volume which he felt was of even greater value [Giambattista Vico, *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Max Harold Fisch and Thomas Goddard Bergin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1944), 115-116.]

[5] Vico, *Autobiography*, 160-164.

[6] Vico reproduces his letter from Le Clerc in full, as well as commenting on the ways that Neapolitan thinkers who were displeased with Vico's work sought to discredit Le Clerc's remarks (*Autobiography,* 158-159)

[7] Max Harold Fisch, "Introduction," in *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, ed. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1944), 81-82.

> funeral degenerated into a public quarrel, as the professors of the University of Naples and the members of the Contrafraternity of Santa Sofia, to which Vico had belonged, argued over which group should provide his pallbearers. In the end, his body had to be carried back into the house, where it awaited burial overnight.[8]

Although not fully embraced except by a small group of close friends, Vico was not, however, as pathetic a character as Grafton would have us believe. In fact, Vico rather capitalized on his liminal position with respect to the world of letters, using his perspective from the margins as a way of rhetorically justifying a kind of privileged relationship to knowledge. Describing such events as falling head-first from a ladder (as a result of which he "grew up with a melancholy and irritable temperament such as belongs to men of ingenuity and depth"[9]) and moving to a castle for nine years[10] before returning to Naples "a stranger in his own land,"[11] Vico's *Autobiography* is in many ways a justification of his sagacity, of the ways in which his marginality had the effect of allowing him to see clearly to the truth of things rather than being compelled by the latest intellectual fashions, like Cartesianism, for example:

> So for all these reasons Vico blessed his good fortune in having no teacher whose words he had sworn by, and he felt most grateful for those woods in which, guided by his good genius, he had followed the main course of his studies untroubled by sectarian prejudice; for in the city taste in letters changed every two or three years like style in dress.[12]

Marginalized as a result of social and political factors, then, Vico, was unacknowledged during his lifetime in a way that for a long time obscured the originality of his genius. In spite of his own unique claims to wisdom, however, and regardless of the factors that precluded his fame, Vico's neglect is not in and of itself sufficient to justify his installation within the broader canon of philosophy or social theory. In fact, Vico,

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[8] Anthony Grafton, "Introduction," in *New Science*, ed. David Marsh (London: Penguin, 1999), xii.

[9] Vico, *Autobiography*, 111.

[10] Ibid., 118-119

[11] Ibid., 132.

[12] Ibid,, 133.

himself, would possibly argue, in fact, that his marginality within the philosophical tradition is a product of his *un*importance or superfluity. Commenting on the relationship of the quality of ideas to their textual transmission:

> There is, therefore, more wit than truth in Bacon's statement that in the tidal wave of the barbarians' invasions, the major writers sank to the bottom, while the lighter ones floated on the surface. In each branch of learning, instead, it is only the most outstanding authors who have reached us, by virtue of being copied by hand. If one or another was lost, it was purely by chance.[13]

Although Vico is here addressing issues pertaining to the transmission of knowledge prior to the age of mechanical reproduction, and is particularly interested in challenging the Baconian claim that only the most trivial of knowledge has survived, he still makes an important point: absence in and of itself is not enough to justify presence. There must be something more, a necessity such that the tradition can or should not be without it. There must be more than an absence, there must be a lack.

In light of this tacit recognition, there have been several approaches adopted by Vico scholars meant to forge a sense of canonical lack.[14] Especially common following Vico's introduction to North America through Bergin and Fisch's 1944 English translation of his *Autobiography*, are studies that take a history of ideas approach. In this, Vico and his writing are read in terms of their broader significance within the history of ideas, outlining his thought in relation to its influences and influence with respect to broader historical movements. Excellent examples of this kind of analysis include Adam's *The Life and Writings of Giambattista Vico*,[15] and the material prefacing Fisch and Bergin's translation of *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*.[16] More than

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[13] Giambattista Vico, *On the Study Methods of Our Time*, trans. Elio Gianturco (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 73.

[14] For two excellent accounts of Vico's reception in Anglo-American tradition, see Battistini's "Contemporary Trends in Vichian Studies" [In *Vico: Past and Present*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981)] and Verdicchio's "Vico Today in North America" [*Italian Quarterly* 21 (1995): 83-92].

[15] H. P. Adams, *The Life and Writings of Giambattista Vico* (London: Russell & Russell, 1970).

[16] Fisch, "Introduction."

situating Vico's own work, these analyses posit Vico as necessary to the understanding of the contemporary philosophical milieu by drawing genealogical connections between Vico and canonical figures who were supposedly directly influenced by him (for example, Hume, Warburton, Burke, Coleridge, and others).[17] This kind of positioning functions by making Vico important historically, which is to say that, even if passé by virtue of being surpassed by those who have been inspired by them, Vico's ideas are important in tracing the development of the Western philosophical canon to date. This kind of 'missing link' analysis has, however, been recently challenged by Mooney, whose *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric*,[18] situates Vico historically in such a way as to demonstrate the ways in which most of his ideas were derived from the rhetorical tradition in which he worked, and that his limited novelty had no direct effect on the trajectory of social scientific movements. Although his influence may be seen in contemporary thinkers like Gadamer, Foucault, Derrida, and Hayden White, it is now generally accepted that Vico's influence has been minimal, and that the history of ideas would largely have progressed in much the same way without him. As Verene comments,

> Vico has, in fact, had no serious effect on the development of modern thought or society. The scholarship concerning Vico's influence on French thinkers and the nineteenth-century German Romantics, in addition to the circulation of this thought in Great Britain, and the use of his ideas by the early Italian nationalists does not show that Vico has had any decisive influence in the course of Western thought and life in the two and one-half centuries since the publication of his definitive version of the *New Science*.[19]

In light of this admission, that Vico is not, in fact, a giant on whose shoulders subsequent great thinkers have sat, and that he is in no way necessary to explain the history of the tradition of western philosophy, many have adopted, instead, a comparative approach, seeking to show the pertinence of Vico's ideas by drawing similarities between

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[17] Ibid., 82ff.

[18] Michael Mooney, *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

[19] Donald Phillip Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 22.

them and those of contemporary thinkers in order to establish Vico as a man marginal because before his time. In this vein, Vico has been compared with such diverse people as Marx,[20] Nietzsche, [21] Merleau-Ponty,[22] Freud,[23] and Levi-Strauss, [24] to name but a few. The problem with this kind of comparative analysis, however, is that it serves only to make Vico's superfluity more salient. In effect, these discussions are lamentations. If only we had listened to Vico, they cry, we could have arrived here long ago. In not listening to Vico in the first place, we had to wait for others to come to his same conclusions and it is only in hindsight, after taking a long and circuitous path, that we are now able to recognize in Vico a short-cut. With Vico's major ideas articulated, and articulated better, in his absence, these discussions have the effect of reducing Vico to a curiosity rather than a thinker of truly original importance.

Lastly, there are those who, acknowledging Vico's marginality, want to make Vico relevant by speaking him into the problems of contemporary philosophy. Seeking to make Vico relevant, there are a number of articles of the type, "what Vico can teach

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[20] Hayward R. Alker "Rescuing "Reason" from the "Rationalists": Reading Vico, Marx and Weber as Reflective Institutionalists," in *Rediscoveries and Reformulations: Humanistic Methodologies for International Studies*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Romano Madera, "Fetishism Theory: From Vico to Marx," *Review* 9, no. 2 (1985): 241-255; Giorgio Tagliacozzo, ed., *Vico and Marx: Affinities and Contrasts* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, Inc.) 1983.

[21] Sandra Rudnick Luft, "The Secularization of Origins in Vico and Nietzsche." *Personalist Forum* 10, no. 2 (1994): 133-148; Robert C. Miner, *Vico, Genealogist of Modernity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002); David W. Price, "Vico and Nietzsche: On Metaphor, History, and Literature," *Personalist Forum* 10, no. 2 (1994): 119-132.

[22] James M. Edi, "Vico and Existential Philosophy," in *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*, eds. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden White (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969).

[23] Ernesto Grassi, "Vico versus Freud: Creativity and the Unconscious," in *Vico: Past and Present*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981); Patrick H. Hutton, "The Art of Memory Reconceived: From Rhetoric to Psychoanalysis," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987): 371-392.

[24] Edmund Leach, "Vico and Levi-Strauss on the Origins of Mankind," in *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden White (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972).

us." These look to Vico as a way of breathing new life into such disciplines as philosophy,[25] sociology,[26] economics,[27] and linguistics[28] (once again, among others). These analyses acknowledge Vico's marginality, while at the same time pointing to his novelty, and see Vico's thought as a kind of corrective to a philosophical tradition that could have been otherwise. Most typical of these kinds of articles is a sentiment illustrated by the often-quoted French historian Paul Hazard.

> If only Italy had lent an ear to Giambattista Vico; If only, as at the time of the Renaissance, she had assumed the leadership of Europe, our intellectual history would have had a very different tale to tell. Our eighteenth-century ancestors would not have believed that everything that was clear was necessarily true. On the contrary they would have looked on clarity as a defect rather than a virtue in the matter of human reason. If an idea is clear, it means that it is finished, rounded off, over and done with. They would have given pride of place in the hierarchy of faculties, not to reason, but to the imagination.[29]

The most recent, and I think most promising, approach to Vico studies, therefore, has been to take Vico's marginality seriously, to accept him as a figure excluded from the tradition of Western thought and who, for exactly that reason, is able to speak from a position unencumbered by the Enlightenment's juggernaut-like momentum: as a true critic of modernity. Vico's value, then, lies, not in spite, but rather because of his marginal position with respect to a nascent Enlightenment tradition. Born on its cusp,

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[25] Max Harold Fisch, "What Has Vico to Say to Philosophers of Today?" *Social Research* 43, no. 3 (1976): 399-433.

[26] Werner Stark, "The Theoretical and Practical Relevance of Vico's Sociology for Today," *Social Research* 43, no. 4 (1976): 818-825.

[27] Giorgio Tagliacozzo, "Economic Vichianism: Vico, Galiani, Croce—Economics, Econimic Liberalism," in *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden V. White, 349-370. Baltimore, MA: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969.

[28] R. Di Pietro, "Linguistic Creativity: A Vichian Key to Contemporary Humanism," in *Vico: Past and Present*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981).

[29] Paul Hazard, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century: From Montesquieu to Lessing*, trans. J. Lewis May (New York: Meridian Books, 1963), 35.

Vico was nonetheless prophetically uncomfortable with many of its underlying assumptions.

Friedrich Nietzsche observed that the Reason upon which the hope of the Enlightenment project was built—the hope that humanity could liberate itself from structures of authority and progress, toward freedom, through a mastery of Nature and of itself—could not, itself, hold up against the criteria to which it held the rest of the world:

> Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as science "without any presuppositions"; this thought does not bear thinking through, it is paralogical: a philosophy, a "faith," must always be there first of all, so that science can acquire from it a direction, a meaning, a limit, a method, a *right* to exist. (Whoever has the opposite notion, whoever tries, for example, to place philosophy "on a strictly scientific basis," first needs to stand not only philosophy but truth itself *on its head*—the grossest violation of decency possible to two such venerable females!)....The truthful man, in the audacious and ultimate sense presupposed by the faith in science, *thereby affirms another world* than that of life, nature, and history; and insofar as he affirms this 'other world,' does this not mean that he has to deny its antithesis, this world, our world?[30]

Observing that an adherence to Reason is far from reasonable, but rather an insupportable article of faith, and that there is always already a discontinuity between the conclusions of Reason and the truth of the world, Nietzsche sparked a series of critiques of Enlightenment Reason, and attempts to forge an alternative, which fall loosely under the rubric of the 'postmodern.'

In spite of their critical stance towards the Enlightenment, however, such 'postmodern' perspectives are, nevertheless, inescapably haunted by its specter, and in such a way that they cannot help but critique it from inside. As Foucault remarks:

> You either accept the Enlightenment and remain within the tradition of its rationalism (this is considered a positive term by some and used by others, on the contrary, as a reproach), or else you criticize the Enlightenment and then try to escape from the principles of rationality (which may be seen once again as good or bad). And we do not break free of this blackmail by introducing "dialectical" nuances while seeking to determine what good and bad elements there may have been in the Enlightenment....We must

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[30] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals/Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York, NY: Vintage, 1967), 152.

> proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment"[31]

More optimistically, Richard Rorty argues that the Enlightenment and 'postmodernism' are naturally continuous, the latter merely extending the former beyond the self-imposed limits of its own Reason:

> The twentieth century project of treating Nature and Reason as unneeded substitutes for God is continuous with Enlightenment anti-authoritarianism. Getting rid of our sense of being responsible to something other than, and larger than, our fellow human beings is a good idea. Insofar as the terms "Nature," "Reason" or "Truth" are used to refer to something of this sort, we should drop these terms form our vocabulary.[32]

Whether its logic is futilely challenged or fully embraced, the consensus would appear that we are inescapably formed and informed by the presuppositions of the Enlightenment. We are Enlightenment subjects and, as such, the limits of our discourse are in large part established by its language and its values. Even if we can identify the failings and tragic consequences of its logic, we are nevertheless hard-pressed to think in such a way as to escape it. What we need, then, is a voice from outside of the tradition that has formed us, a voice capable of rupturing our taken-for-granted discourse and beliefs and providing us with another way.

As he implies in his *Autobiography*, Vico's marginal position with respect to his own time and to the Enlightenment tradition in general does, indeed, put him in a position of epistemological privilege, a position that he exploits in almost every aspect of his work. Yet, Vico's marginality does not manifest itself in a philosophy of alterity. Not presuming to be able to think outside of the limits of established by language and through tradition and common sense, Vico finds his originality in his quick wit and prudence, in his ability to invent novel relationships between existing elements in order to address the

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[31] Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" in *The Essential Foucault*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 2003), 51.

[32] Richard Rorty, "The Continuity between the Enlightenment and Postmodernism," in *What's Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question*, ed. Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hanns Reill (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 20.

needs of concrete social situations. A project established in his first published oration *On the Study Methods of our Time*, Vico's original critique of the nascent Enlightenment was not strictly reactionary, but rather consisted in facilitating an ongoing dialogue between the wisdom of the past that of the present in order to find concrete solutions to contemporary problems. In contrast to the Enlightenment will to free itself from the bondage of tradition, then, Vico finds his originality in the desire to preserve it. In humility, Vico warns his readers: "even if you know more than the Ancients in some fields, you should not accept knowing less in others. You should make use of a method by which you can acquire, on the whole, more knowledge than the ancients, and, being aware of the shortcomings of ancient methods of study, you may endure the unavoidable inconveniences of our own."[33]

Perhaps nowhere is this attitude of critical humility toward the Enlightenment more apparent than in Vico's relationship to Francis Bacon. A figure who championed the rejection of tradition and the refiguring of knowledge in accordance with the demands of instrumental rationality, Bacon has come to stand for many of the Enlightenment features that have come under attack during the latter half of the twentieth century. Although sharing the 'postmodern' suspicion of the Enlightenment Rationality personified by Bacon, Vico is nevertheless forgiving and, in fact, insists on elevating him as one of the four authors of greatest influence on his life and work. In this respect, then, Vico's relationship to Bacon is in many ways representative of his attitude to knowledge production as a whole. Although often misguided, Vico also recognizes in Bacon certain projects of tremendous value which he reworks in light of wisdom from the past in order to produce an oeuvre of such tremendous originality that its full significance is only now being discovered. To this extent, Vico's attraction as an Enlightenment critic comes not from his affinities with a particular tradition, for, as truly marginal he belongs to none. Rather, his alterity come from his willingness to engage all perspectives equally. Neither conservative nor reactionary, Vico is prudent, and it is in the place of overlap between traditions, in dialogue, that we find his true sagacity.

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[33] Vico, *Study Methods*, 5.

This treatise will concern itself with one small, yet surprisingly significant, example of Vico's critical engagement with Francis Bacon, one that takes place with respect to a curious image used as a frontispiece to the second and third editions of Vico's major work, the *New Science*. Although Vico does not explicitly mention Bacon in connection with the image, this work will show that Bacon is nonetheless present as a specter. In contrast to the specters of the enlightenment which lamentably constrain the limits of contemporary discourse, however, Vico uses Bacon's presence ironically, as a way of producing a clearing which is ultimately deconstructive of the very assumptions necessary to making it intelligible in the first place. As we shall see, the brilliance of Vico's ingenuity shines through the frontispiece as a moment in which the Baconian interest in the advancement of learning is redeemed in light of the wisdom of the ancients, but more significantly, as a moment in which the reader is redeemed. Accepting the reader as one who is technologized by Reason, and whose natural potential is limited by the demand for certainty and utility, Vico's frontispiece lures them into the image in order to attune them to their true nature, not ultimately as Rational, but as a creative agent who is, themselves, ultimately responsible for the world they inhabit.

Vico's Frontispiece

Vico had originally intended to introduce his *Second New Science* with what he called a "*Novella Litteraria*," a reproduction of the correspondence he had had with Father Carlo Lodoli, which was meant to document the problems he had encountered in trying to publish the work in Venice, and to justify his decision to publish it in Naples instead. At the last moment, however—in fact after printing had already begun—Vico mysteriously withdrew the *Novella* and replaced it with a commissioned picture, or *dipintura*. As Vico recounts in his *Autobiography*,

> after more than half of it [the *Second New Science*] had been printed, a final communication from Venice constrained him [Vico] to suppress eighty-six pages of what had been printed. These pages contained an advertisement in which all the letters of Father Lodoli and his own in connection with this affair were printed in full and in order, with the

> reflections suggested by them. For this advertisement he now substituted an engraved frontispiece and an explanation long enough to fill the void.[34]

A mishmash of assorted hieroglyphs and emblems, Vico's frontispiece is bizarre, perplexing scholars who would try to understand it in relation to the text it is supposedly meant to introduce. This strangeness, as well as its late and last minute addition to the *New Science* have made Vico's frontispiece a subject of general neglect among Vico scholars. In fact, the frontispiece and all reference to it were excluded entirely from Bergin and Fisch's 1970 translation of the *New Science*. As they confess in their introduction, "We omit the engraving and retain only so much of [Vico's] introduction as makes no reference to it."[35] Indeed, its last-minute inclusion would suggest its superfluity; yet, a careful reading of what Vico says elsewhere reveals that, more than a derivative way to fill space, the frontispiece is actually of central importance to an understanding of the *New Science* as a whole. Among the third of four sets of corrections, revisions and additions to the second edition of the *New Science*, for example, is a document entitled the "Practic of the New Science," in which Vico outlines his intention for the *New Science* as more than a text to be read, but rather as a practice that begins and ends with a consideration of his *dipintura*: "The practice of the science that we as philosophers can offer is such that can be completed within the academies. What it requires of us is that, from these human times of acute and intelligent minds in which we are born, we should here at the end look back to the picture that was placed at the beginning."[36]

Acknowledging both its importance to the practice of the *New Science*, then, some have argued that we are not meant to interpret the image in terms of meaning, but rather in terms of function. Frankel, for example, speculates that the frontispiece and its

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[34] Vico, *Autobiography*, 194.

[35] Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch, 3rd revised and abridged ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970). 3. All subsequent references to the *New Science* refer to the 1984 unabridged edition.

[36] Giambattista Vico, "Practic of the New Science," in *The New Science of Giambattista Vico* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 427-428.

accompanying commentary are meant to perform the modes of language that Vico describes as characterizing his three stages of human development:

> If I am correct in supposing that one of Vico's purposes in adopting the "dipintura" was to reproduce these three languages in the introductory part of his work, it is obvious that he could not convey the language of the first age, which was a mute language of gestures or "bodies." But he could include it in a picture which, while it clearly is an emblem as in the language of the second age, at the same time contains physical objects or "hieroglyphs," that is the elements of the first language of man.[37]

Similarly concerned with function, Wessely argues that the image is meant to encourage the reader to suspend all that they have formerly taken for granted, and to "avoid the traps of clear and distinct language."[38]

> This is how he prepares for the catharsis (*persuasio*) the new science has in store for him [the reader]. It 'overthrows all that has been erroneously known and imagined so far', making the reader see everything in a dazzling new light, and learn everything anew 'as if there were no books in the world.'[39]

In both these instances, the frontispiece is convincingly described as serving a rhetorical function. The fact that Vico also chooses to include an extensive (if 'rambling'[40]) commentary, however, would suggest that the image is also meant to be read. As Vico himself explains, "We hope it may serve to give the reader some conception of this work before he reads it, and, with such aid as imagination may afford, to call it back to mind after he has read it."[41] To the extent that the image is intended as a memory aid, Vico seems to suggest a signifying function. The meanings of Vico's hieroglyphs, and that of the image as a whole, however, are not self-evident, but are rather textually dependent. As Danto observes, "One picture is here vehemently worth a thousand words, at least in

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[37] Margherita Frankel, "The "Dipintura" and the Structure of Vico's "New Science" as a Mirror of the World," in *Vico: Past and Present*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981), 49.

[38] Anna Wessely, "The Frontispiece of Vico's New Science," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 263 (1989): 566.

[39] Ibid., 567

[40] Ibid., 566

[41] Vico, *New Science*, 3.

terms of occupied space. But without those words the picture is not worth much, or is a mere visual puzzle....This much is clear: If Vico had not explained, symbol by symbol, what each thing meant, there would be no way of inferring to the tremendous vision that is *The New Science*."[42] Alone, Vico's frontispiece is so strange and confused that it refuses its reader the ability to discern any singular significance. A set of signifiers without immediately evident signifieds, the frontispiece is radically polysemic, and it is a recognition of this fact that motivates Vico's use of text to explain, and so, in the words of Roland Barthes, 'anchor' the image's meaning.[43] Just as Barthes explains apropos of the photographic image, "the text constitutes a parasitic message designed to connote the image, to 'quicken' it with one or more second-order signified....in the relationship that now holds, it is not the image which comes to elucidate or 'realize' the text, but the latter which comes to sublimate, pathetize or rationalize the image."[44] Vico uses his extensive commentary to fix the meaning of every single hieroglyph and every single relation depicted within the frame of the frontispiece leaving, in a sense, nothing up to the imagination. On the surface, then, Vico frames his image in such a way as to suggest a meaning that is clear and distinct. Yet, once attuned to the function of the commentary as a frame or code for interpretation, we also become attuned to the fact that Vico also frames his frontispiece in a second, more subtle way, through a deliberate use of intertext. Just as Vico designs the image to be understood in terms of its commentary, so, too, does he design his commentary to be understood in terms of its subtle references to outside texts.

Most commentators acknowledge this dual signification, and read the frontispiece, not for what it says explicitly, but rather by appeal to some 'breadcrumb' left by Vico that would suggest a reading in light of some other literary tradition.

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[42] Arthur C. Danto, "Art," *Nation* 260, no. 13 (1995): 465.

[43] Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image Music Text* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1977), 38-41.

[44] Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Image," in *Image Music Text* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1977), 25.

Verene,[45] for example, analyses the frontispiece in light of Vico's reference to the Tablet of Cebes: "As Cebes the Theban made a table of moral institutions, we offer here one of civil institutions."[46] The Tablet of Cebes, with which Vico would have become familiar through Shaftesbury,[47] describes a group of pilgrims who, confused by a picture found at the temple of Saturn, are led down the path of true education by an old man and his explanation of the image. In spite of the fact that Vico's discussion of the tablet is brief and never revisited, it is nevertheless significant, argues Verene, for it is revealing of one of Vico's latent but central motivations. Just as "Cebes's Tablet and its pictorial explanation give us the course of the individual human life with its positive and negative forces toward moral education," so was "Vico's science [...] to be a moral conscience, a science to lead to true education."[48]

The most common way of understanding the frontispiece, however, is through an awareness of the fact that Vico seems to explicitly locate himself within what Francis Yates coined as the 'art of memory' tradition[49] for, just as Vico frames the image with a commentary, so, too, does he frame his commentary with a description of purpose:

> As Cebes the Theban made a table of moral institutions, we offer here one of civil institutions. We hope it may serve to give the reader some conception of this work before he reads it, and, with such aid as imagination may afford, to call it back to mind after he has read it.[50]

Vico's apparent concern with memory, then, has led many to locate the frontispiece within the tradition of the art of memory as described by Francis Yates and elaborated by

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[45] Donald Phillip Verene, "Vico's Frontispiece and the Tablet of Cebes," in *Man, God, and Nature in the Enlightenment*, eds. Donald C. Mell, jr., Theodore E. D. Braun and Lucia M. Palmer (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1988).

[46] Vico, *New Science*, 3.

[47] Fisch, "Introduction," 81-82.

[48] Verene, "Vico's Frontispiece," 8.

[49] Francis Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.), 1966.

[50] Vico, *New Science*, 3.

Paolo Rossi.[51] Addressing the frontispiece directly, Rossi, for example, argues that Vico's introduction is in keeping with the precepts of "artificial memory" as they were widely held during the Italian Renaissance.[52] Agreeing with Rossi, Hutton argues that, more than merely functioning from within the art of memory tradition, Vico also played a crucial role in the transition from its rhetorical use during the renaissance, to its use as a technique for self-analysis: "By the eighteenth century, however, a new science of humanity was in the making, and it was in this context that the art of memory was to be reconceived. The central figure in this revisioning of the role of memory in culture was the Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico."[53]

It is also common to use Vico's connection with the art of memory tradition to draw out the potential hermetic of cabalistic elements in his frontispiece. In particular, Frankel argues that the frontispiece shows Vico's susceptibility to the ambitions of renaissance authors who "[aimed] at nothing less than achieving total knowledge by deciphering the secrets and the meaning of the universe."[54] In Frankel's account, Vico uses the image as a way of producing a kind of 'mirror of the world,' a reflection of the ultimate structure of reality and a means through which to acquire a total understanding of that reality. Presumably informed by some of Vico's early orations, in which he seems to make total knowledge a priority, accounts like these construct Vico as a strange mixture of Renaissance mystic and Enlightenment totalizer. Colilli, for example, suggests that Vico is writing within the cabalistic/hermetic art of memory tradition (and especially from the techniques of Giordano Bruno), but that he deviates to the extent that he was motivated rationally to determine meaning rather than mystically by describing and so maintaining a space of open interpretation:

> Vico structures his thinking following the logic whereby he states that the hieroglyph 'signifies, means, represents, symbolizes', and then provides

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[51] Paolo Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory: The Quest for a Universal Language*, trans. Stephen Clucas (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[52] Ibid., 27-28.

[53] Patrick H. Hutton, "The Art of Memory Reconceived: From Rhetoric to Psychoanalysis," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987): 375.

[54] Frankel, "The 'Dipintura,'" 45.

> the interpretation and exegesis within the thematic context of what we find in the New Science. In Bruno, however, the image or seal is subject to a purely descriptive, non-hermeneutic formula. The 'Idea of the Work' in Vico's New Science is a critical interpretation of what the hieroglyphs in the frontispiece signify. It is not solely a description, it also explains the meaning of the objects from within a philosophical/philological framework.[55]

To invoke the art of memory in these analyses seems appropriate. What should be clear from the preceding, however, is that the art of memory tradition is so broad, and characterized by so many different perspectives, that, especially given Vico's extensive background in rhetoric, one is bound to find affinities with any number of different sub-traditions. The result is a series of analyses that agree that Vico is, and *should be*, located within the tradition, but which disagree as to the exact nature of his location. The question, then, is not *whether* Vico makes use of the art of memory, but rather, *which* art of memory? And *how*?

A single reference to a vague tradition is not sufficient to fix the significance of Vico's frontispiece. The polysemy that defines the interpretive tradition surrounding Vico's frontispiece arises as a result of the insufficiency of a single point of reference, and the lack of a second term by which it might be able to possible to triangulate its intended meaning. The implication of these multiple interpretations, therefore, is that Vico has, either intentionally or by mistake, refused his readers a complete code for understanding the image.

Missing from scholarly consideration of the frontispiece, then, is an appreciation of the full extent of Vico's intertextuality, of the fact that his reference is not merely to a vague tradition, but rather to its specific articulation in the thought of Francis Bacon. Vico's statement that "We hope it may serve to give the reader some conception of this work before he reads it, and, with such aid as imagination may afford, to call it back to mind after he has read it,"[56] is not merely an account of the frontispiece's purpose, nor is

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[55] Colilli, Paul. "Giordano Bruno's Mnemonics and Giambattista Vico's Recollective Philology." In *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher of the Renaissance*, ed. Hilary Gatti, 345-364. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2002, 358.

[56] Vico, *New Science*, 3.

it a reference to a vague tradition whose history, at the time of Vico's writing, had already extended over two thousand years. Instead, it is a statement that resonates strongly with Francis Bacon's articulation of the art of memory in *Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning*:

> This art of memory is but built upon two intentions; the one prenotion, the other emblem. Prenotion dischargeth the indefinite seeking of that we would remember, and directeth us to seek in a narrow compass, that is, somewhat that hath congruity with our place of memory. Emblem reduceth conceits intellectual to images sensible, which strike the memory more.[57]

Prenotion and emblem; preconception and memory. The similarity in language, in addition to the central place occupied by Bacon in other of Vico's works, demands that we take this resonance seriously.

An affinity that has been recognized by Papini[58] and Verene,[59] there has yet to be written anything that would carefully consider Vico's *dipintura* specifically in the light of Vico's clear use of Baconian intertext. Taking Vico's apparent reference to Bacon's art of memory as its point of departure, therefore, the following will attempt to draw out the implications of a strictly Baconian reading of the *dipintura*.

As necessary to establishing the background to a Baconian reading of the *dipintura*, chapter 1 is concerned with justifying the nature of Vico's relationship to Bacon in the first place. Noting Vico's identification of Bacon as one of the four authors whose work is of such value as to justify having it always before his mind, it will suggest that Vico's work follows a distinctive pattern of critical repetition. Holding Bacon's projects as valuable in themselves, Vico nonetheless also identifies several faulty assumptions that lie at the heart of his reasoning, and so taint Bacon's own execution. As

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[57] Francis Bacon, "Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning. Books II – VI," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, vol. IV (New York, NY: Garrett Press, 1968), 436.

[58] Mario Pipini, *Il Geroglifico Gella Storia: Significato E Funzione Della Dipintura Nella 'Scienza Nuova' Di G. B. Vico* (Balogna: Nuova Casa, 1984), 76.

[59] Donald Phillip Verene, *Knowledge of Things Human and Divine: Vico's New Science and Finnegans Wake* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 153-154.

will be argued, Vico's career shadows Bacon's, as an effort to reproduce Bacon's major philosophical works in light of a corrected logic.

Having established Vico's relationship to Bacon, chapter 2 will begin a reading of Vico's frontispiece by explicating Bacon's view of memory, both natural and artificial, with respect to his conception of the rational soul. As will be seen, Bacon articulates the use of artificial memory, not only because of its ability to abolish the limits of knowledge accumulation, but also because of its ability to technologize the human soul by limiting imagination and structuring it according to the demands of the faculty of Reason.

Chapter three describes Vico's account of memory revealing that, consistent with his pattern of correction and repetition, Vico's differs substantially from Bacon's. Rather than advocating the use of artificial memory, Vico is suspicious of its technologizing function and advocates, instead, a cultivation of natural memory, which he conceives, not as distinct from the imagination, but rather identical to it. More than this, Vico demonstrates a suspicion of Reason in general, suggesting that it is not, in fact a natural faculty, but rather a method masquerading as a faculty. Characterizing human nature as inventive rather than rational, Vico's conception of memory stands in sharp contrast to that of Bacon.

Finally, returning to the frontispiece, we find a tension between Vico's suspicion of the art of memory on the one hand, and his apparent use of it on the other. As we shall see in chapter 3, Vico develops this tension intentionally, as a way of drawing the reader into a critical relationship with the picture that makes use of Bacon in order to overcome him. Interpreted in light of Bacon's art of memory, the *dipintura* is revealed, not as a singular image, but rather as two which, considered separately and together, lead the reader to an understanding of memory, and of their own nature, which stands in opposition to the Enlightenment intellectual tradition that Bacon's art of memory would otherwise presuppose.

CHAPTER 1

VICO AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO BACON

The importance of Francis Bacon to Vico's intellectual development and scholarly writing is well established, and justified in light of the strength of Vico's own autobiographical remarks. Recounting the moment when, in 1707,[60] he first came into contact with the writings of Francis Bacon, Vico writes

> And now at length Vico's attention was drawn to Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, a man of incomparable wisdom both common and esoteric, at one and the same time a universal man in theory and in practice, a rare philosopher and a great English minister of state. Leaving aside his other works on whose subjects there were perhaps writers as good or better, from his *De augmentis scientarum* Vico concluded that, as Plato is the prince of Greek wisdom, and the Greeks have no Tacitus, so Romans and Greeks alike have no Bacon.[61]

Using this logic of originality, Vico produces a short list of three authors that would be "ever before him in meditation:"[62] Plato, Tacitus, and Bacon, which he would later expand to four with the inclusion of Grotius. Although Guido Fassò argues that Bacon, along with each of Vico's other 'four authors' serves more of a rhetorical function (as a "poetical character") within his narrative of personal-intellectual development,[63] by far the most common sentiment amongst scholars is that "Francis Bacon is present in Vico's thought as more than an intellectual symbol."[64] Or, as Haddock notes, that "the thesis that Bacon provided the intellectual catalyst for many of Vico's later ideas is too well

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[60] Vico, *Autobiography*, 227.

[61] Ibid., 139.

[62] Ibid., *Autobiography*, 139.

[63] Guido Fassò, "The Problem of Law and the Historical Origin of the *New Science*," in *Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanity*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Donald Phillip Verene, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 8; See also Guido Fassò, *I "Quattro Auttori" Del Vico, Saggio Sulla Genesi Della "Scienza Nuova"* (Milano: A. Giuffrè, 1949); and Guido Fassò, *Vico E Grozio* (Napoli: Guida, 1971).

[64] Enrico De Mas, "Vico's Four Authors," in *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), 10.

established to require further elaboration."[65] To be sure, many have quite astutely recognized and expounded upon particular conceptual similarities and differences in the thinking of the two men; to date, however, there has yet to be written an English account of the centrality of Bacon to Vico's project as a whole.[66] The goal of this chapter, therefore, will be to trace their relationship, arguing that it is Francis Bacon who, more than any other, seems to inspire the development of Vico's specific projects. Vico's career is a kind of extended conversation with Francis Bacon, a man who Vico respected deeply, and whose projects he felt important to pursue even if their original executions by Bacon were plagued by fundamental errors. As will be shown, Vico's intellectual career is characterized by a pattern of correction and repetition: of identifying the flaws in Bacon's assumptions and reasoning, and repeating his projects as corrected versions of the failed originals. To this extent, Vico, in many ways, strives to be more Baconian than Bacon himself.

On the Study Methods of our Times

Vico's discovery of Bacon marks a turning point in his career, for it is as a result of reading Bacon, and marveling at his ability to see the gaps and defects in the current state of the arts and sciences,[67] that Vico writes *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione* (*On the Study Methods of our Time*), his first publication, and the first articulation of his original position.[68]

Study Methods is written as a direct response to Bacon's distinguished essay *De dignitate et de augmentis scientarium* (*Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning*), a fact that is evident from the opening lines of Vico's work:

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[65] Bruce Anthony Haddock, *Vico's Political Thought* (Brynmill, Swansea: Mortlake Press, 1986), 25.

[66] The only work to date formally dedicated to explicating the relationship between Vico and Bacon is in the often-cited Italian treatise by Enrico De Mas, *Bacone e Vico* (Turín: Edizioni di Filosofia, 1959).

[67] Vico, *Autobiography*, 139.

[68] Verene, *New Art of Autobiography*, 15.

> In his small but priceless treatise entitled *De dignitate et de augmentis scientiarum*, Francis Bacon undertakes to point out what new arts and sciences should be added to those we already possess, and suggests how we may enlarge our stock of knowledge, [as far a necessary,] so that human wisdom may be brought to complete perfection.[69]

As is apparent from his autobiographical account, Vico singles *Advancement of Learning* out from the rest of Bacon's work for both its ambition and originality, and it is on the basis of this work alone that Vico initially elevates Bacon to become on of his 'four authors.' Given his introductory remarks, it is evident that Vico intends his own work to be read in light of Bacon's. More than this, however, Vico also uses Bacon as the benchmark against which he hopes the success of his own work will be judged:

> The oration for this occasion was therefore to be published, and it gave Vico a happy opportunity to devise an argument that should bring some new and profitable discovery to the world of letters,—a desire worthy to be numbered among those of Bacon in his *New Organ of the Sciences*.[70]

Vico's goals in writing *Study Methods* are in many ways identical to those of Bacon in *Advancement of Learning*. Like Bacon, Vico is concerned with describing the current state of the 'world of letters,' and with reflecting on the deficiencies in education that prevent the advancement of learning. Vico lauds Bacon's effort, and so imitates it as, in a sense, the highest form of flattery. In a deeper sense, however, Vico claims that his return to Bacon is not derivative, but rather necessary by virtue of a fundamental deficiency that he identifies in the assumptions that underlie Bacon's approach. Vico's critique of Bacon in this respect is threefold. First, Vico criticizes Bacon for constructing a method and system of knowledge that claims to account for all things both natural and historical, but which, in so doing, fails to consider the diversity of human experience. Second, in excluding the human, the Baconian desire after the advancement of knowledge fails to offer any kind of insight into or guidance for the ethical life of human beings. Lastly, seeking to correct his lack of ethical consideration, Vico writes *Study Methods* as a corrective to Bacon's vision of advancement. Arguing that any conception of advancement that does not consider its consequences for human moral decision-

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[69] Vico, *Study Methods*, 3-4.

[70] Vico, *Autobiography*, 146.

making is necessarily incomplete, Vico puts forth an alternative method of study that privileges wisdom over knowledge, and prudence over Bacon's method of science.

First, Vico's criticism of Bacon anticipates Horkheimer and Adorno's in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In their seminal work, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that it is Francis Bacon who, more than any other, embodies the concerns for disenchantment and for utility that characterize the spirit of the age.

> Enlightenment's program was the disenchantment of the world. It wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge. Bacon, "the father of experimental philosophy," brought these motifs together. He despised the exponents of tradition, who substituted belief for knowledge and were as unwilling to doubt as they were reckless in supplying answers. All this, he said, stood in the way of "the happy match between the mind of man and the nature of things," with the result that humanity was unable to use its knowledge for the betterment of its condition.[71]

Bacon defines natural philosophy as "the Inquiry of Causes and the Production of Effects,"[72] suggesting that its results be recorded in a register of natural history and organized into three categories: generations (the works of nature), pretergenerations (mistakes of nature), and arts (experimental history). This division, however, is largely arbitrary for, as Bacon argues, in the end nature herself is absolute:

> The artificial does not differ from the natural in form or essence, but only in efficient; in that man has no power over nature except that of motion; he can put natural bodies together, and he can separate them; and therefore that whatever the case admits of the uniting or disuniting of natural bodies, by joining (as they say) actives and passives, man can do everything; where the case does not admit this, he can do nothing.[73]

In positing the convertibility of power and knowledge, Bacon is also quick to emphasize that it is "nature which governs everything,"[74] with the implication that his is ultimately a logic of discovery rather than creation. There are regularities in nature, argues Bacon, which are observable, but which are also possible to identify through experimentation, for

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[71] Max Horkheimer, and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1.

[72] Bacon. "Advancement of Learning. II-VI," 346.

[73] Ibid., 294.

[74] Ibid., 295.

no art can achieve what nature will not allow. Irregularities, likewise, are still governed by nature, identified as irregular solely on account of their failing to fit into existing hypotheses.[75] More than this, however, Bacon advocates the creation of a register of natural wonders "because from the wonders of nature is the most clear and open passage to wonders of art."[76] On the one hand, then, Bacon extols the supremacy of nature in both governing itself and establishing the limits of possibility of human discovery through experimentation. On the other hand, however, Bacon also reduces knowledge about nature to the identification of regularities through its use. As such, Bacon wrongly conflates the use of nature with nature itself, and it is in light of this mistake that Vico launches his main criticism in *Study Methods*:

> But, while he discovers a new cosmos of sciences, the great Chancellor proves to be rather the pioneer of a completely new universe than a prospector of this world of ours. His vast demands so exceed the utmost extent of man's effort that he seems to have indicated how we fall short of achieving an absolutely complete system of sciences rather than how we may remedy our cultural gaps.[77]

In his concern for the construction and completion of a system of knowledge, argues Vico, Bacon is guilty, not only of establishing a world which is not coincident with nature itself, but also a world that neglects the element of the social. As such, Bacon "acted in the intellectual field like the potentates of mighty empires, who, having gained supremacy in human affairs, squander immense wealth in attempts against the order of nature herself, by paving the seas with stones, mastering mountains with sail, and other vain exploits forbidden by nature."[78]

As Vico so astutely recognizes, Bacon reduces knowledge, even that about human affairs, to that which can be used in order to achieve a kind of mastery. Knowledge, in Bacon, consists of that which can be put to good use, of that which can be used to develop technologies to improve human quality of life:

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[75] Ibid., 297-298.

[76] Ibid., 296.

[77] Vico, *Study Methods*, 4.

[78] Ibid.

> For creation was not the curse made altogether and forever a rebel, but in virtue of that charter "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," it is now by various labours (not certainly by disputations or idle magical ceremonies, but by happy labours) at length and in some measure subdued to the supplying of man with bread; that is, to the uses of human life.[79]

To this extent that it uses efficacy as the sole criterion of truth, then, Baconian knowledge is itself technologized.

Bacon's conflation of the true and the useful is perhaps most evident in his incessant railing against magic and superstition. As Rossi observes of Bacon, he

> definitely detached himself from Renaissance alchemical and scientific traditions when he set up as a model for his New Science the mechanical arts with their progressive collaborative procedures. For he wanted science to depart from arbitrary uncontrolled personal research and turn instead to organized collaborative experiment, and he believed his logic would make the conquest of new truths possible.[80]

Procedure produces certainty, which Bacon insists is identical with truth. Limited to acting upon external things, experimental procedures limit the field of certainty to that which can be evidenced through sensory experience, and it is for this reason that Bacon is critical of superstition, and that he chooses to defer to scripture and the church in all matters of religion:

> The bounds of this knowledge, truly drawn, are that it suffices to refute and convince Atheism, and to give information as the law of nature; but not to establish religion.[81]

"Giv[ing] unto faith the things that are faith's,"[82] Bacon suggests that "moral philosophy may be admitted into the train of theology, as a wise servant and faithful handmaid to be

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[79] Francis Bacon, "The New Organon," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, vol. IV (New York, NY: Garrett Press, 1968), 248.

[80] Paolo Rossi, *Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science*, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1968), 23.

[81] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 341.

[82] Ibid., 342.

ready at her beck to minister to her service and requirements."[83] Given the bounds of knowledge that Bacon establishes, bounds that would exclude anything metaphysical or supra-sensible,[84] it is not surprising that Bacon refuses to establish a moral philosophy.[85]

Bacon's refusal is not without consequence, however, for in excluding the knowledge of the nature of the good from his account,[86] he reduces it to the status of non-knowledge. Yet, as Vico so eloquently point out, it is the moral questions, those 'cultural gaps,' that are in fact of most importance, and are most important on account of their uncertainty.

> But the greatest drawback of our educational methods is that we pay an excessive amount of attention to the natural sciences and not enough to ethics. [...] Since, in our time, the only target of our intellectual endeavours is truth, we devote all our efforts to the investigation of physical phenomena, because their nature seems unambiguous; but we fail to inquire into human nature which, because of the freedom of man's will, is difficult to determine. A serious drawback arises from the uncontrasted preponderance of our interest in the natural sciences.[87]

In his essay "Giambattista Vico and 'The Method of Studies in Our Times,'" Perkinson mistakes certain of Vico's critiques of Bacon as of Descartes and, in so doing, constructs Vico's essay as a work that uses Baconian rhetorical concepts in order to combat the, then prevalent, Cartesian methods of education. Although Vico's anti-Cartesianism is

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[83] Francis Bacon, "Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning. Books VII.-IX," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, vol. V (New York, NY: Garrett Press, 1968), 20.

[84] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 346.

[85] Perhaps the single exception to Bacon's refusal of moral philosophical principles is argued by Macmillan: "Bacon contents himself with laying down a principle which he considers of paramount importance, and capable of being applied as a touchstone to decide between two conflicting views of different schools of moral philosophy. This great principle is the superiority of the general good over the private good" [Michael Macmillan, "Bacon's Moral Teaching," *International Journal of Ethics* 17, no. 1 (1906): 56]. This moral principle, however, is itself technologized in Bacon's account, as necessary to advancement ("Advancement of Learning, VII-IX" 13-14) and, as such, ends up technologizing human beings, putting them in the service of knowledge rather than the other way around.

[86] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 346.

[87] Vico, *Study Methods*, 33.

well-established, and that it figures prominently in *Study Methods*, Perkins fails to acknowledge that Vico's comments with respect to the lack of ethical consideration are in fact launched against Baconian induction (or the 'method of science') as well. In spite of this confusion, however, Perkins identifies an important distinction in *Study Methods*:

> Science, Vico says, tends to the highest truths, whereas prudence tends to the lowest. The highest truths are eternal and never changing, whereas the lowest are those that from one moment to the next become false. Since human affairs, in this view, are dominated by occasion and choice, both of which are uncertain, then it is the lower truths toward which prudence tends that are important for the conduct of civil life.[88]

In light of his interest in the ethical or the civil life, and this continuum of truths, from highest to lowest, eternal to ephemeral, Vico produces a typology of scholars:

> In the conduct of life the fool, for instance, pays no attention to the highest or the meanest of truths; the astute ignoramus notices the meanest but is unable to perceive the highest; the man who is learned but destitute of prudence, deduces the lowest truths from the highest; the sage, instead, derives the highest truths from the unimportant ones[89]

In this typology, Vico is actually complimentary of Bacon, describing him as a sage whose method of induction "proceeds from one experiment to another; or else from experiments to axioms,"[90] and so moves progressively from the particular to the abstract. Vico is critical of Bacon, however, for denying the fundamental uncertainty of all of concrete existence, both natural and human: "Abstract, or general truths are eternal; concrete or specific ones change momentarily from truth to untruths. Eternal truths stand above nature; in nature, instead, everything is unstable, mutable."[91] In a move reminiscent of Heraclitus, then, Vico reduces all concrete particulars to uncertainties, and in so doing accomplishes two things. First of all, he justifies a place for the ethical within Bacon's account of the divisions of the arts and sciences because the natural and

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[88] Henry J. Perkinson, "Giambattista Vico and "the Methods of Studies in Our Times": A Criticism of Descartes' Influence on Modern Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1962): 39-40.

[89] Vico, *Study Methods*, 34.

[90] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 413.

[91] Vico, *Study Methods*, 35.

historical phenomena that Bacon seeks to enumerate are, in the end, just as uncertain and mutable as the conditions of civil life. Second, Vico secures a place for the metaphysical which had, under Bacon, been excluded. As such, Vico argues that, in order to deal with the uncertainty of lower truths, human beings, in humility, have no choice but to look beyond sense. Vico therefore applauds Bacon for his concern for the lower, but challenges him to recognize the impossible gap that exists between the incertitude of concrete experience, and the universality of general axioms. In Bacon, this gap is bridged by method:

> Now the senses, though they often deceive us or fail us, may nevertheless, with diligent assistance, suffice for knowledge; and that by the help not so much of instruments (though these too are of some use) as of those experiments which produce and urge things which are too subtle for the sense to some effect comprehensible by the sense.[92]

Yet, in human affairs especially, Vico challenges that it is "impossible to assess human affairs by the inflexible standard of abstract right; we must rather gauge them by the pliant Lesbic rule, which does not conform bodies to itself, but adjusts itself to their contours."[93] The true sage, then, is not the one who seeks to arrive at the higher through technology, or the application of method, but rather through application of prudence.

> But the sage who, through all the obliquities and uncertainties of human actions and events, keeps his eye steadily focused on eternal truth, manages to follow a roundabout way whenever he cannot travel in a straight line, and makes decisions, in the field of action, which, in the course of time, prove to be as profitable as the nature of things permits.[94]

Advocating prudence over scientific method, or a process of decision-making toward action that makes comparisons and judgments according to the particularities of a given situation, Vico re-humanizes knowledge. In place of the technology of scientific method, which Bacon suggests be placed between the lower and the higher in order to eliminate the uncertainty inherent to human agency, Vico installs the individual subject who becomes the source of mediation between the particular and the universal. Particular

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[92] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 412.

[93] Vico, *Study Methods*, 34.

[94] Ibid., 35.

circumstances call for particular methods, argues Vico, and to this extent Vico merely takes the advice laid out by Bacon, who says that "I for my part receive particular Topics [places of invention and inquiry appropriated to particular subjects and sciences] as things of prime use."[95]

Replacing abstract method with concrete prudence, Vico is, finally, critical of Bacon's notion of advancement. For Bacon, advancement consists in accumulation. In every field within the arts and sciences, Bacon advocates the development of registers containing certain facts which can be used in order to discover and record more certain facts. Now, Vico in no way discourages the kind of accumulation about which Bacon speaks, and, in fact, would encourage the discoveries and innovations that have resulted in following the scientific method and, in fact, carefully enumerates many of the advancements that have been made in the fields of physics, chemistry pharmacology, astronomy, and geography.[96] Yet, there are also many ways in which the modern methods applied to these fields are deficient relative to those of the ancients, and so Vico's *Study Methods* represents an effort to re-write *Advancement of Learning* in light of the deficiencies that Vico identifies in the area of civil life. As Mooney observes,

> Vico associated himself fully with the mind of Bacon. Yet he did so, typically, in a wholly singular way. Not the growth of knowledge but the health of society was Vico's concern.[97]

What ultimately concerns Vico is not advancement or accumulation, but rather the promotion of prudence, and it is in this spirit that he writes *Study Methods*. In contrast to Bacon, who would see future advancement made possible only through the rejection of the past, or of methods that do not fall directly in line with his own, Vico maintains an eye to the present, a distinction that is made apparent by the careful selection of his title; rather than being concerned with the *advancement* of learning (future), Vico is concerned with the study methods of *our time*, or with the evaluation of method in terms of the distinct conditions of the present. Bacon incites his readers to "rather (after the advice of

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[95] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 424.

[96] Vico, *Study Methods*, 9-11.

[97] Michael Mooney, *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 162.

Scripture) look forward to that part of the race which is still to be run, than look back to that which has been past,"[98] and bluntly states that

> It is idle to expect any great advancement in science from the superinducing and engrafting of new things upon old. We must begin anew from the very foundations, unless we would revolve forever in a circle with mean and contemptible progress.[99]

Vico, on the other hand, wisely advises that

> Even if you know more than the Ancients in some fields, you should not accept knowing less in others. You should make use of a method by which you acquire, on the whole, more knowledge than the Ancients, and, being aware of the shortcomings of ancient methods of study, you may endure the unavoidable inconveniences of your own.[100]

Rather than starting from scratch, and failing to acknowledge one's own fallibility as Bacon does, Vico advocates a process whereby the wisdom of the present is compared with that of the past in order to identify and put into practice the best of both:

> No doubt all that man is given to know is, like man himself, limited and imperfect. Therefore, if we compare our times with those of the Ancients—if we weigh, on both sides, the advantages and deficiencies of learning—our achievements and those of Antiquity would, by and large, balance.[101]

Acknowledging the uncertainty that pervades all of human life, including that which would endeavor to investigate nature, *Study Methods* represents an attempt on Vico's part to correct and repeat a Baconion effort which he views as laudable, but nonetheless flawed in some of its most basic assumptions. Vico's work is one that privileges prudence over advancement, ethics over method, and that does so not only in argument, but also in performance. Vico's is, itself, a work of prudence, seeking to compare and evaluate the ancient and the modern in order to establish the best method of study in the present.

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[98] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 285.

[99] Bacon, "New Organon," 52.

[100] Vico, *Study Methods*, 5.

[101] Ibid., 4.

Critical of Bacon, Vico is, however, neither unforgiving nor lacking in humility, for he concludes *Study Methods* with a rearticulating of comments he had made in an earlier oration with respect the scholarly practice of good faith:[102]

> As you saw, whenever drawbacks had to be pointed out, I passed individual authors in silence; and whenever it was necessary to mention these authors, I did it with utmost respect, since it was not for an unimportant man like me to censure persons so eminently great. As for the drawbacks, I sedulously set them forth as unobtrusively as possible.

Nor does Vico claim to have the final word on this matter for, a work of prudence, new times will call for new evaluations of methods, and it is as a part of this ongoing dialogue between the past and the present that Vico wishes his work to be situated: "permit me to say that I shall be greatly indebted to anyone who wishes to criticize with pertinence and with concrete reference to their intrinsic purport, the points that I have brought up, so as to free me from eventual errors. He will be certain to enlist my gratitude by his mere intent to do so.[103]"

On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians

In 1710, Vico's *De Antiquissima Italorum Sapientia* (*On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*) once again takes aim at reworking a Baconian text, *De Sapientia Veterum* (*The Wisdom of the Ancients*). What is immediately apparent in comparing the two texts is the similarity of their titles: they both concern the wisdom of the ancients. Vico's title, however, is distinguished from Bacon's by its use of the surperlative, an indication of the fact that Vico's work is meant to surpass that to which it intertextually refers. Claiming to describe the *most* ancient wisdom, Vico's title stakes a claim to a wisdom that is more ancient than Bacon's.

Written in 1609, a hundred years before Vico's work, Bacon's *Wisdom of the Ancients* represents an original interest on Bacon's part to reconcile the wisdom of the past with that of the present. As Bacon clearly articulates in the preface to his work,

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[102] Giambattista Vico, "Oration III: On True Learning," in *On Humanistic Education (Six Inaugural Orations, 1699-1707)*, ed. Donald Phillip Verene (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 76ff.

[103] Ibid., 81.

> Nor is there any man of ordinary learning that will object to the reception of it as a thing grave and sober, and free from all vanity; of prime use to the sciences, and sometimes indispensable.[104]

Vico here finds a Bacon that is more sympathetic to his Renaissance humanist desire to preserve tradition rather than sweep it away. The fulfillment of one the *desiderata* identified in *Advancement of Learning*,[105] *Wisdom of the Ancients* is an exposition of several Greek myths, elaborating the philosophical claims that Bacon suggests were evident to their original hearers, but which have since been lost. By recovering their original wisdom, Bacon argues that these myths may be used, once again, "as a method of teaching, whereby inventions that are new and abstruse and remote from vulgar opinions may find an easier passage to understanding."[106]

Bacon's intention for his work, however, is anything but unambiguous. On the one hand, Bacon claims to throw light upon antiquity.[107] On the other hand, however, he also claims to use ancient parables to more easily communicate the new and abstruse. One is bound to read Bacon's expositions with suspicion, then, and perhaps accuse Bacon of being Janus-faced, claiming to speak for the past while, in fact, simply using it as a source of authority for his own opinion in the same way as he accuses certain writers of civil history of "impress[ing] on their works the image not so much of their minds as of their passions, ever thinking of their party."[108] On whether his reflections actually pertain to the wisdom of the ancients, Bacon concludes the preface to his work with a statement of ultimate indifference:

> Upon the whole I conclude with this: the wisdom of the primitive ages was either great or lucky; great if they knew what they were doing and

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[104] Francis Bacon, "Of the Wisdom of the Ancients," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, vol. VI (New York, NY: Garrett Press, 1968), 698.

[105] "But since that which has hitherto been done in the interpretation of these parables, being the work of unskilful men, not learned beyond common places, does not by any means satisfy me, I think it fit to set down Philosophy according to the Ancient Parables among the *deiderata*." (Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 317-318.

[106] Bacon, "Wisdom of the Ancients," 698.

[107] Ibid., 699.

[108] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 302.

> invented the figure to shadow the meaning; lucky, if without meaning or intending it they fell upon matter which gives occasion to such worthy contemplations. My own pains, if there be any help in them, I shall think well bestowed either way: I shall be throwing light either upon antiquity or upon nature herself.[109]

It is this tension that appears to inform both Vico's praise and criticism. As he recounts in his *Autobiography*,

> Meanwhile Vico, by the reading of Bacon of Verulam's treatise *On the Wisdom of the Ancients*, more ingenious and learned than true, was incited to look for its principles farther back than in the fables of the poets.[110]

Vico is, therefore, critical of Bacon on two counts. First, by suggesting that Bacon's work was 'more ingenious than true, Vico identifies the problem above, that, although thoughtful and engaging, it nonetheless fails to properly identify ancient wisdom preferring, instead, to use Greek fables as an opportunity to communicate his own theories in a form that is more palatable for the vulgar masses. Second, as indicated by the title of his work, Vico challenges Bacon for not looking back far enough. True, Bacon insists that the Greek fables contain and communicate wisdom far older than themselves, "for so they must be regarded as neither being the inventions nor belonging to the age of the poets themselves, but as sacred relics and light airs breathing out of better times, that were caught from the traditions of more ancient nations and so received into the flutes and trumpets of the Greeks."[111] Yet, Vico is emphatic that it is possible to discern ancient wisdom from a source far older than the Greeks, and far more directly, in the etymologies of Latin words:

> He applied himself therefore to search out these principles in the origins of Latin words; for certainly the wisdom of the Italian sect had in the school of Pythagoras a much earlier flowering and a greater depth than that which began later in Greece itself.[112]

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[109] Bacon, "Wisdom of the Ancients," 699.

[110] Vico, *Autobiography*, 148.

[111] Bacon, "Wisdom of the Ancients," 698. See also "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 317.

[112] Vico, *Autobiography*, 148.

On the model of Plato's *Cratylus*,[113] *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians* aims at searching out the ancient wisdom contained in the etymologies of Latin words and, to this extent, makes significant a second qualification that distinguishes his title from that of Bacon, for Vico's work deals with subject matter more ancient than Bacon's in two respects. On the one hand, it appeals to words rather than fables for, as linguistic expressions, fables necessarily rely on existent words that function as the condition of their possibility. On the other hand, Vico defers to the Italians over the Greeks out of a conviction that the roots of many Latin words and phrases are reflective of such a wisdom as could not have been derived from anyone but the early philosophers of Ionia and Etruria.[114] Vico, then, challenges Bacon for not truly addressing his own *desideratum*, and so prefaces his work by situating it as a kind of true fulfillment: "As far as I know, this is something no one has attempted hitherto, and perhaps it deserves to be numbered among Francis Bacon's desiderata.[115]

A fulfillment of a Baconian project, Vico's investigation into the wisdom of the ancients leads him to discover an epistemological principle that also serves to both explain and challenge the status of Baconian induction. Expressing great distrust for the mind, Bacon's *Novum Organum*, (*New Organon*) posits as most certain a method of induction beginning with the particulars of sensory experience and moving progressively toward general principles:

> Now my method, though hard to practise, is easy to explain; and it is this. I propose to establish progressive stages of certainty. The evidence of the sense, helped and guarded by a certain process of correction, I retain. But the mental operation which follows the act of sense I for the most part reject; and instead of it I open and lay out a new and certain path for the mind to proceed in, starting directly from the simple sensuous perception.[116]

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[113] Giambattista Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians: Unearthed from the Origins of the Latin Language*, trans. L. M. Palmer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 39.

[114] Vico, *Most Ancient Wisdom*, 37-40; 154.

[115] Vico, *Most Ancient Wisdom*, 39.

[116] Bacon, "New Organon," 40.

Vico, however, astutely challenges Bacon's faith in sensory experience by observing that the work of the mind is never absent, and to this extent, human knowledge, even that which seeks to found itself purely in the senses, is always already abstract.[117] A consequence of this is that, far from being the *most* certain, "the more our sciences are immersed in bodily matter, the less certain they are."[118]

For the ancient Italians, claims Vico, "the true is precisely what is made,"[119] which is to say that real and true knowledge of the world is possible only to the extent that one is knowledgeable about the conditions of its making, or, to the extent that one *is* its creator. By virtue of the fact that God is maker of everything, Vico holds Divine revelation as necessarily true, even if we cannot comprehend it.[120] Geometry (i.e. deduction), too, is a source of true knowledge. The reason for this, however, is that, for Vico, geometry is a system created by men, existing wholly and entirely within the mind and so with no relation to true world we inhabit. Between divine revelation and human construction, there is Baconian induction through the use of controlled experiments: "hypotheses about the natural order are considered most illuminating and are accepted with the fullest consent of everyone, if we can base experiments on them, in which we make something similar to nature."[121] Induction is useful in informing our relationship to lived reality because, through experiments, we recreate the world on the model of the divine. It is limited, however, because they are artificial and take for granted a material world already created.

Once again, however, rather than rejecting Bacon outright, Vico sees him as merely mistaken. For Vico, Bacon is unsuccessful because he fails to recognize the unbridgeable epistemological gap between knower and known, and the fact that this gap may only be closed where the knower is also creator; where the true and the made are convertible. *The New Science*, then, represents an attempt on Vico's part to fulfill and

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[117] Vico, *Most Ancient Wisdom*, 52.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid., 46.

[120] Ibid., 48.

[121] Ibid., 52.

succeed Bacon's vision by applying his method of induction to an appropriate object capable of yielding true and certain knowledge. The social world—as linguistic—is absolutely a human creation and so it is here, and only here, that human beings can attain true knowledge about something real. Vico's new science is an application of Bacon's method in so far as it consists of a cross-comparison of particular nation-histories as recorded in language and myth, in order to determine an "ideal eternal history" of the world. Moving from concrete particulars to "imaginative universals," Vico does not repudiate Bacon, but rather corrects him in order to fulfill his original intention.

The New Science

"The most important thing of all,"[122] Bacon is careful in *Advancement of Learning* to both distinguish and anticipate the *New Organon* as the most crucial piece of his entire philosophical system, the *Instauration magna*:

> When a man tries all kinds of experiments without order or method, this is but groping in the dark; but when he uses some direction and order in experimenting, it is as if he were led by the hand; and this is what I mean by Learned Experience. For the light itself, which was the third way, is to be sought through the Interpretation of Nature, or the *New Organon*.[123]

In contrast to methods of experimentation which are strictly limited to particulars—i.e. the effects that are brought about under the particularities of a particular experimental circumstance—and which Bacon amply sets out in *Advancement of Learning*, [124] the *New Organon* was to establish the method by which the results of particular experiments might be converted into more general axioms and visa versa.[125] The *New Organon* was intended as a correction to Aristotle's *Organon*, or 'instrument,' in which he sets out the formal structure of his logic. Bacon's work, then, more particularly takes aim at the Aristotelian syllogism, arguing against the deductive process whereby propositions are

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[122] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI" 421.

[123] Ibid., 413.

[124] Ibid., 413ff.

[125] Ibid., 413.

determined with respect to their consistency with more abstract and unverifiable propositions:

> The most conspicuous example of the first class was Aristotle, who corrupted natural philosophy by his logic: fashioning the world out of categories; [...] imposing countless [...] arbitrary restrictions on the nature of things; being always more solicitous to provide an answer to the question and affirm something positive in words, than about the inner truth of things.[126]

In response to Aristotle and the Aristotelian tradition, Bacon uses Aristotle's four causes as a means by which to establish a sharp distinction between the relative aims of metaphysics and physics: "I repeat however that all of these above mentioned are to be no further handled in Physic than the inquiry of their Material and Efficient causes; for as to their Formal and Final causes they are rehandled in Metaphysic."[127] Physics, then, may legitimately concern itself solely with the identification of the materials out of which compound substances are made, and with establishing the concrete conditions under which things affect each other. As far as essence and teleology are concerned, on the other hand, these are the domain of Metaphysic. Privileging sensory experience over abstract rationality, however, Bacon uses this causal distinction as a way of dismissing Metaphysics out-right for this "assignation, as far as it relates to Forms, may seem nugatory; because of a received and inveterate opinion that the Essential Forms or true differences of things cannot by any human diligence be found out."[128] Essences, argue Bacon, lie outside of the purview of scientific method and, as such, cannot enter into that set of considerations that constitute legitimate knowledge. In making this distinction, and in his exclusion of metaphysics, Bacon engages in tactics similar to those used in *Wisdom of the Ancients*, emptying ancient categories of thought in order to re-appropriate them for more modern ends. Instead of using the concept of Forms to describe the hidden essences of things, Bacon uses the term to refer to general axioms, discoverable through

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[126] Bacon, "New Organon," 64.

[127] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, VII-IX," 57.

[128] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 360.

the process of deduction, which serve to account for particular causes and effects as they are observable in nature:

> Thus, having offered a list of fundamental properties or "natures" which we are able to tabulate as resulting from our sense perception, the ulterior notion of Form points to that invisible arrangement which can account for them. If there is a given nature which we perceive, then there should be a Form of it which sense cannot attain, but whose construal is the work of the intellect governed by true method, that is, by induction.[129]

As we have seen, Bacon's is ultimately an epistemology of use and effect, a fact that is more explicitly evident in the *New Organon* than anywhere else: "the roads to human power and to human knowledge lie close together, and are nearly the same."[130] Here, more than in *Advancement of Learning*, we see that technology is operative at every stage of the inductive process, from experiment, to axiom, to works. First, Bacon is emphatic on the point that "by far the greatest hindrance and aberration of the human understanding proceeds from the dullness, incompetency, and deceptions of the senses."[131] The natural senses being in and of themselves deficient, Bacon insists that understanding can only be achieved through the introduction of method, which is to say through systematic and orderly experimentation.[132]

> For the sense by itself is a thing infirm and erring; neither can instruments for enlarging or sharpening the senses do much; but all the truer kind of interpretation of nature is effected by instances and experiments fit and apposite; wherein the sense decides touching the experiment only, and the experiment touching the point in nature and the thing itself.[133]

Legitimate knowledge, then, can only be achieved through the application of technology. In Bacon's account, human nature, as nature, is coextensive with the nature it seeks to understand. In order to arrive at a knowledge of the world that is abstracted from the

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[129] Antonio Pérez-Ramos, "Bacon's Forms and the Maker's Knowledge," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bacon*, ed. Markku Peltonen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 105.

[130] Bacon, "New Organon," 120.

[131] Ibid., 58.

[132] Ibid., 70.

[133] Ibid., 58.

knowing subject, the subject must first take the world as a thing from which it is separated. This separation is only possible through the introduction of something that is different in kind from the nature it is used to divide: artifice, or technology in the form of controlled experimentation. Once this separation is effected, the subject is then capable of taking the world as-if-it-were-other, and so can arrive at a kind of knowledge abstracted from its own creative subjectivity. All this is to say that the subject cannot arrive at knowledge of nature by merely existing in and as a part of it. They must, instead, separate themselves from nature and put it to good use.

Next, technology is also operative in the construction of general axioms, or Baconion Forms, for the single criterion for the establishment of a legitimate Form is that it works: "For a true and perfect rule of operation and then the direction will be *that it be certain, free, and disposing or leading to action.* And this is the same thing with the discovery of the true Form. For the Form of a nature is such, that given the Form nature infallibly follows."[134] In Bacon's account, and according to the criteria he sets out, general axioms discovered through inductive reasoning are nothing if not ultimately resulting in further action, whether experiment or invention, and to this extent axiom and work, although considered separately, are in practice inseparable.

To summarize then, Bacon's *New Organon* is premised on the identity of knowledge and power; or, framed in such a way as to be more easily compared with Vico's epistemology, we might say that the true and the useful are convertible:

> Lastly, I would address one general admonition to all; that they consider what are the true ends of knowledge, and that they seek it not either for pleasure of mind, or for contention, or for superiority to others, or for profit, or fame, or power, or any of these inferior things; but for the benefit and use of life.[135]

Now, as we have seen with respect to two of Vico's earlier works, Vico's projects are largely selected and written as corrections to Baconian texts. Vico's *New Science* is no different for, again like the examples already discussed, its title was carefully selected in

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[134] Ibid., 121.

[135] Francis Bacon, "The Great Insaturation," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, vol. IV (New York, NY: Garrett Press, 1968), 21.

such a way as to refer to the Baconian text that came before it, suggesting that Vico intended his work to function as a kind of *New Organon* of history.[136]

The *New Science* elaborates, clarifies, and puts into practice Vico's *verum-factum* principle which, as we have seen, was meant, in part, as a critique of the inductive method so foundational to the *New Organon*. The true (*verum*) and the made (*factum*) are interchangeable. Now, Fisch convincingly argues that this is, in fact, a metaphysical principle, one that appeals directly to the medieval notion of transcendentals.[137] Above categories, applying to every category, and referring to the truth of things rather than propositions,[138] the medieval list of transcendentals included *ens* (being), *unum* (one), *verum* (true), and *bonum* (good), and were characterized by the property of convertibility. This is to say, for example, that the true is necessarily good, necessarily unified, and necessarily existent. To the extent that the *verum-factum* principle concerns truth, and to the extent that it makes truth and made convertible, Vico's epistemology, argues Fisch, is premised on an addition of the *factum* to the original list of transcendentals, which Vico justifies theologically:

> "The true is precisely what is made" (*verum esse ipsum factum*). And, therefore, the truth is in God, because God is the first maker; this first truth is infinite, because He is the maker of all things; it is completed truth because it represents to Him all the elements of things, both external and internal, since he contains them.[139]

As made, human beings participate in the truth of the world, but cannot know it. As a transcendental and a metaphysical concept, truth is a category under which human beings are themselves subsumed, and so in equating the metaphysical *verum*, Vico claims that the *factum* is a distinctly divine form of making, a making that is impossible for human beings to accomplish, but only imitate through experimentation:

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[136] Fisch, "Introduction," 20.

[137] Max Harold Fisch, "Vico and Pragmatism," in *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden White (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), 407.

[138] Verene, *Science of Imagination*, 45.

[139] Vico, *Most Ancient Wisdom*, 46.

> For this reason, hypotheses about the natural order are considered most illuminating and are accepted with the fullest consent of everyone, if we can base experiments on them, in which we make something similar to nature.140

Vico, then, is in agreement with Bacon. The finite limits of human nature make metaphysical knowledge, which is to say knowledge about formal and final causes, impossible to attain. Vico, however, goes further than Bacon, suggesting that since *all* truth, as *verum*, is metaphysical, even truth about material and efficient causes, physics cannot, properly speaking, arrive at knowledge of truth: either as human beings are not, themselves, the cause of the causes they investigate, they are inescapably limited to knowledge that works, and knowledge by agreement, rather than knowledge of the true. Vico's *verum-factum* principle is, then, disruptive of the Baconian identity between the true and the useful. "Partaking of reason, but not always having full possession of it,"[141] the knowledge of human beings is necessarily imitative, pragmatic, and, although in relation to truth, always separated from it. In this sense, Vico agrees that technology conditions the possibility of human knowledge; yet, in contrast to Bacon, who would suggest that artifice provides access to the true, Vico points out that artifice begets artifice and so, while partaking in the true, the technologies of human knowledge are always obstructive. By challenging Bacons confusion of truth and use, Vico tacitly accuses Bacon in the same way that Bacon accused Aristotle before him, of confusing a world of his own invention with the world as it is, or of being "rather the pioneer of a completely new universe than a prospector of this world of ours."[142]

Vico's one exception to the limits of the human mind with respect to truth is in the field of geometry, in which true knowledge is possible by virtue of the fact that its subject matter and first principles are wholly and entirely human constructs. Geometry, claims Vico, is entirely the creation of human minds, created from nothing, and so possible to know absolutely: "there is no doubt that geometry and arithmetic, above all

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[140] Ibid., 52.

[141] Ibid., 46.

[142] Vico, *Study Methods*, 4.

the other sciences that are called subaltern, are either absolutely true or certainly bear in themselves quite an exceptional resemblance to the truth."[143]

Although bearing an exceptional resemblance to truth, Vico ultimately finds that, even in the most abstract field of mathematics, and although the product of human making, human beings are still alienated from the *verum* for, as a transcendental, *verum* is convertible with, among other things, *ens*, or being. A true act of transcendental making, then, must produce something that *is*, for only something that *is* can be true. The field of geometry, however, is ultimately premised on two fictions:

> Man then turns this fault of his mind to good use and creates two things for himself through what is called "abstraction": the point that can be drawn and the unit that can be multiplied. Yet these are both fictions. For the point is not longer a point if you draw it; and the unit is no longer fully one if you multiply it.[144]

What should be clear, is that Vico's criticism continues to be on the level of the transcendental. Geometry is incapable of real truths (*verum*), because the product of its making (*factum*) are neither existent (*ens*; as in the case of the point), nor one (*unum*; as in the case of the unit). It is on account of its failure to produce anything real that Vico ultimately challenges even geometry's claim to *verum*, suggesting that its vacuity is transformed into the semblance of truth only as a result of its ability to "wash away the blemish of [its] origin."[145]

An issue that pertains most directly to Vico's relation to Bacon's *New Organon,* is certainty, an issue that is for the most part absent from Vico's metaphysical work, but which he mentions briefly in order to pick up in greater detail in his *New Science*: "since human knowledge is purely abstractive, the more our sciences are immersed in bodily matter, the less certain they are."[146]

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[143] Vico, *Most Ancient Wisdom*, 69

[144] Ibid., 50.

[145] Ibid., 52.

[146] Ibid.

To the *verum*, which pertains strictly to the metaphysical, Vico opposes the *certum* (certain) which, as Trabant explains, consists of a kind of knowledge from the experience of making the cultural world:

> When we do something ourselves, our source of certainty is similar to that of a craftsman who makes things by hand, for if I have made something with my own hands, I know how it came to be and the way that it is.[147]

The key to understanding the *certum*, therefore, is that it involves the making of *things*, rather than just abstract concepts, and, to this extent, occupies a position of far more epistemological reality. Hence, it is the civil world, a thing of truly human making, that is the fundamental concern of Vico's *New Science*:

> Now, as geometry, when it constructs the world of quantity out of its elements, or contemplates that world, is creating it for itself, just so does our Science [create for itself the world of nations], but with a reality far greater by just so much as the institutions having to do with human affairs are more real than points, lines, surfaces, and figures are. And this very fact is an argument, O reader, that these proofs are of a kind divine and should give thee a divine pleasure, since in God knowledge and creation are one and the same thing.[148]

In contrast to the *verum*, which pertains to a distinctly metaphysical kind of truth, and one which is only possible to grasp by God, the agent of first and ultimate *factum*, the *certum* pertains to processes of human and/or cultural production. In the civil world, social institutions are created in the minds of human beings, but, constituting the limits of human social activity, do, in fact, have a concrete reality greater than that of mathematics. Social institutions are, as Vico points out, created on the model of divine making; yet, this making is *not factum*, because its products are not metaphysical. Although partaking of the true, the artifacts of human activity are, nonetheless cultural rather than ontological, and so cannot properly be described in terms of *verum*. Vico, then, uses the concept of the *certum* to describe the kind of knowledge that may achieved by human beings with respect to their cultural and civil productions. It is not a metaphysical

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[147] Jürgen Trabant, *Vico's New Science of Ancient Signs*, trans. Sean Ward (London: Routledge, 2004), 18.

[148] Vico, *New Science*, 104-105.

concept, and so cannot be said to be convertible with the *verum*; yet, argues Vico, the *certum* nonetheless constitutes a legitimate and privileged form of knowledge:

> The principle of *verum-factum* accomplishes a distinction between the divine and the worlds of nature and of man. The principle of *verum/certum* projects this distinction into the basis for understanding the total motions of the human world.[149]

In light of this somewhat lengthy discussion, let us return to the ways in which Vico applies his epistemology to correct Bacon's *New Organon*. As we have seen, Bacon wrote his work as a correction to the abstract and deductive logic established by Aristotle. His 'new instrument,' of experimentation and induction, is contrasted against that of Aristotle which Bacon argues should be rejected on account of its imposition of abstract and unverifiable metaphysical categories onto the concrete physical world. The solution, says Bacon, is to replace the old instrument of deductive reasoning, which is too prone to be affected by the passions and imagination, with a new method capable of all but taking the failings of human nature out of the process of discovery. Bacon, then, considers true knowledge that which can be arrived at through a process that is purely technologized, and whose end is use. For Bacon, truth and power are convertible.

According to Vico, however, Bacon's fundamental error lies in a confusion of the *verum* and the *certum*, which, as we have seen, are not transcendentally convertible. To this extent, Bacon's new instrument fails in the same way as Aristotle's, for, like Aristotle, Bacon presumes to speak for the truth of the world from a position of abstraction, and so, although he produces knowledge that is useful, he fails ultimately to grasp the truth of the things themselves.[150]

Vico's *New Science* places true knowledge, which, regardless of its subject matter is always already a kind of metaphysics, outside of the purview of human discovery. As Vico explains, "Men who do not know what is true of things take care to hold fast to what is certain, so that, if they cannot satisfy their intellects by knowledge (*scienza*), their

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[149] Verene, *Science of Imagination*, 64.

[150] "I have not sought (I say) nor do I seek either to force or ensnare men's judgments, but I lead them to things themselves and the concordances of things, that they may see for themselves what they have, what they can dispute, what they can add and contribute to the common stock" (Bacon, "New Organon," 19)

wills at least may rest on consciousness (*conscienza*)."[151] Even when human beings believe that they have arrived at truth, argues Vico, they have done nothing more than produce a kind of image in the likeness of; not sharing in identity, but rather an artifact masquerading as the thing itself.

Like Bacon, Vico suggests that knowledge is constructed under conditions of use, as is evident when he axiomatically states that "human choice, by its nature most uncertain, is made certain and determined by the common sense of men with respect to human needs or utilities, which are the two sources of the natural law of the gentes."[152] Unlike Bacon, however, Vico argues that conditions of use, far from allowing humans to grasp the things in themselves, actually alienates them. This is in no way to imply that the use of knowledge as *techné* is in any way harmful. To the contrary, Vico is firm on the point that use, or the need to overcome the difficulties of present conditions, conditions the possibility of human civil nature.[153] Yet, as we have seen, Vico does not make the Baconian mistake of conflating use with truth, but rather emphasizes that the products of utility are always tools, creations of human hands to achieve human objectives that could not be achieved otherwise. Use begets use; it begets a thing with a kind of reality, but not a thing coincident with the true. As *factum* is convertible with *verum*, so *use* is convertible with the *certain*.

Vico's *New Science*, then, represents a new logic applied to an appropriate subject matter. Unable to arrive at the true, human beings construct semblances of truth, or certainties, which, forgetting the blemish of their origins, humans accept as if coincident with things in themselves. Recognizing this kind of willed forgetfulness, and distinguishing between the true and the certain, Vico's *New Science*, paradoxically, reclaims truth engaging in a kind of second-order discourse, taking its things-in-themselves not from the creation of which humans are a part, but rather from the discourses or knowledges that humans construct in a vain attempt to grasp the truth of the world in which they are contained. In taking the certain as its object of study, Vico

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[151] Vico, *New Science*, 62-63.

[152] Ibid., 63.

[153] Ibid., 101.

paradoxically arrives at truth for, to the extent that the world of certitude consists wholly and entirely of artifact, and to the extent that that world, as certain, is 'crafted by human hands,' humans are capable of grasping that world in truth, as a thing in itself.

Identifying this fundamental error in Bacon's logic, Vico feels compelled, as he did in *Study Methods* and in *Most Ancient Wisdom*, to repeat the Baconian project. Vico maintains the method of Baconian induction, beginning with the particulars of individual historical events, and moving gradually and systematically toward the construction of more general axioms, or what Vico calls the Ideal Eternal History:

> Uniform ideas originating among entire peoples unknown to each other must have a common ground in truth.
>
> This axiom is a great principle which establishes the common sense of the human race as a criterion taught to the nations by divine providence to define what is certain in the natural law of the gentes. And the nations reach this certainty by recognizing the underlying agreements which, despite variations in detail, obtain among them all in respect to this law. Thence issues the mental dictionary for assigning origins to all the diverse articulated languages. It is by means of this dictionary that the ideal eternal history is conceived, which gives us the histories in time of all nations.[154]

Moving from particulars to more general axioms, Vico adopts the Baconian method of induction outright. Where he is critical, however, and where he sees the need for a corrected work, is in the identification of the proper subject matter for inductive study, and in identifying the limits of claims to truth.

From all three of these works, *On the Study Methods of Our Time*, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, and the *New Science*, it should be evident that Vico in large part structured his projects as critical returns to Baconian projects, motivated by the desire to identify and correct fundamental deficiencies in the basic assumption of what were otherwise praiseworthy endeavors. In words that brilliantly summarize Vico's ambivalent relationship to Bacon, Miner asks "How can Vico be so critical of Bacon's motives, if he admires the works that he thinks a Baconian approach is able to generate?

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[154] Ibid., 63-64.

Vico consistently adheres to the principle that ugly roots can generate beautiful flowers."[155]

[155] Robert C. Miner, *Vico, Genealogist of Modernity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 6.

CHAPTER 2

BACON'S ART OF MEMORY

Bacon's View of Human Nature

Bacon's view of human nature begins with the distinction between the irrational and the rational soul, and the claim that human beings are distinguished by their complexity, consisting of both whereas animals consist of only the former. Assuming a way of thinking that was inaugurated by Aristotle, and fairly typical of the English Renaissance, Bacon uses the concept of the soul as a way of dividing the world in two ways. First, a concept pertaining to motion, Bacon first uses the idea of the soul to distinguish the living from the non-living, the moving from the moved. As Wallace explains, "The soul, then, could be conceived of as a formal principle, an organizing principle, whereby inanimate matter became animate."[156] Having distinguished the animate from the inanimate, Bacon then distinguishes between two types of soul, the rational and the irrational, and it is on the basis of this basic division that he establishes the limits of human philosophy:

> Let us now proceed to the doctrine which concerns the Human Soul, from the treasures whereof all other doctrines are derived. The parts thereof are two; the one treats of the rational soul, which is divine; the other of the irrational, which is common with brutes. I mentioned a little before (in speaking of Forms) the two different emanations of souls, which appear in the first creation thereof; the one springing from the breath of God, the other from the wombs of the elements.[157]

Wallace takes this passage to mean that Bacon thought the human to be divided, consisting of two independent and distinct souls. "Bacon entered this climate of belief not by speculating on the nature of the soul but by declaring in favor of two souls. One was the rational soul, present only in human beings. The other was the irrational soul,

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[156] Karl R. Wallace, *Francis Bacon on the Nature of Man* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 13.

[157] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning. II-VI," 396.

shared by man and brutes."[158] While potentially correct in his assessment, that Bacon held to a dual-souled conception of human beings is unlikely, for to establish such a division would be speculate as to formal causes, the domain of metaphysics. Limited strictly to that which can be observed, Bacon's system of knowledge is restricted to the identification of material and efficient causes. Unable to observe the soul directly, Bacon knows that he doesn't have access to the stuff out of which the soul is made, and so cannot use the term to refer to an actual thing. What he can do, however, is use the term 'soul' to refer to the *place* or *origin* of activity. It is for this reason that Bacon chooses not divide his doctrines according to the divisions of the soul but rather, referring to the Human Soul in the singular, constructs his division on the basis of 'emanations.' In this sense, Bacon does not simply inherit a tradition, as Wallace argues, but rather, in avoiding ontological claims and using concept of 'soul' strictly as a kind of organizing principle, Bacon, in fact, distinguishes himself from it.

The limits Bacon imposes on the possibility of human knowledge affects his account of human nature in a second way. Having divided the soul into two different 'emanations,' one irrational, one rational, Bacon divides them again, by the types causes that may be explored:

> I must subjoin likewise another division of the general doctrine concerning the human soul before I speak more fully of the species. For that which I shall hereafter say of the species will concern both divisions alike; as well as that which I have just set down, as that which I am now about to propose. Let this second division therefore be into the doctrine concerning the Substance and Faculties of the soul, and the doctrine concerning the Use and Objects of the Faculties.[159]

Bacon's doctrine concerning the Substance and Faculties of the souls pertains to their material cause, and the doctrine concerning the Use and Objects of the Faculties corresponds to their efficient. Locating the irrational soul in 'the wombs of the elements,' Bacon also refers to it as sensible, for it is here that bodies come into contact with other bodies in the material world, and to this extent it is subject to investigation in the same ways as the rest of material reality:

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[158] Wallace, *Nature of Man*, 14.

[159] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 397.

> The doctrine concerning the sensible or produced soul, however, is a fit subject of inquiry even as regards its substance; [...] For the sensible soul—the soul of brutes—must clearly be regarded as a corporeal substance.[160]

In contrast, the rational or divine soul of human beings is of a non-corporeal material substance, and so stands beyond the reach of legitimate investigation:

> For since the substance of the soul in its creation was not extracted or produced out of the mass of heaven and earth, but was immediately inspired by God; and since the laws of heaven and earth are the proper subjects of philosophy; how can we expect to obtain from philosophy the knowledge of the substance of the rational soul? It must be drawn from the same divine inspiration, from which that substance first proceeded.[161]

The rational soul, then, cannot be known materially, but rather only by its effects. Just as there is no way to identify the nature of the human soul, and no way to identify the nature of the rational soul, there is also no way to identify the nature of the faculties of the rational soul. Based on what the activities of the rational soul, and on the objects that it affects, it *is* possible, suggests Bacon, to identify several distinct faculties responsible for certain sets of actions. For Bacon, then, faculties are not things, but rather, like the soul, useful principles around which it is possible to organize human action. When Bacon discusses human nature, then, it is important to understand that concepts like the soul, and like faculties refer, not to actual things, but rather *categories* for organizing human activity, and conceptual *places* from which humans encounter the world around them.

Bacon identifies six faculties of the rational soul—Understanding, Reason, Imagination, Memory, Appetite, and Will[162]—corresponding to the six motions of the soul that mediate its relationship to sense in its determination of voluntary action. Concerned here strictly with the thinking faculties, or those involved in making logical determinations, we are left with four: Understanding, Imagination, Reason, and Memory.

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[160] Ibid., 398.

[161] Ibid.

[162] Ibid.

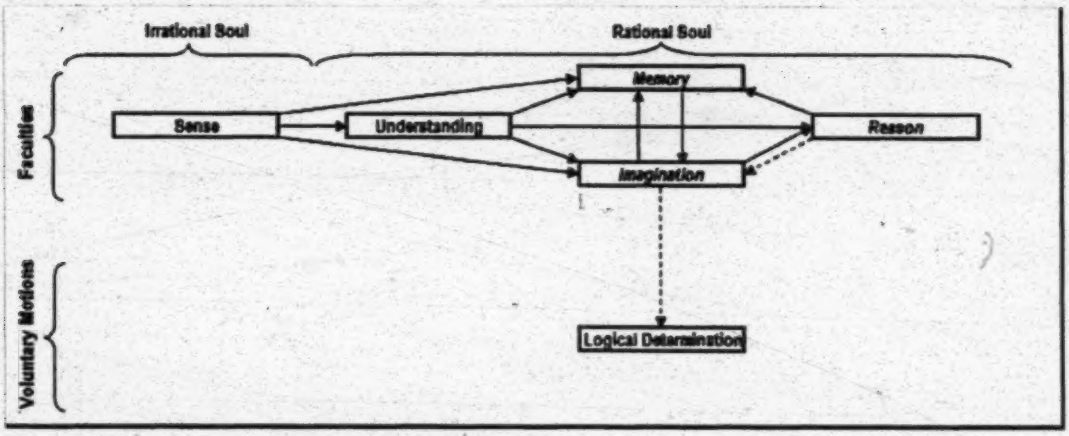

Figure 1. Bacon's model of rational determination

As one would expect, the faculty of Sense refers to the traditional five senses, which human beings share with the rest of animal life, and which represent the locations of contact (each being associated with particular and material organ) between human beings and the material world they occupy: "all Interpretation of Nature commences with the senses by a straight line, regular, and guarded path to the perceptions of understanding, which are true notions and axioms."[163] These are faculties because, although moved by external stimuli, the senses also move, both by acting upon the objects of perception, and in the formation of primordial images that can be used by the rational faculties. Bacon most clearly describes the former movement with respect to the faculty of sight, or the organ of the eye, which he suggests contacts the world by means of rays that are at once received from, and emanated toward, objects under it gaze.[164] On the other hand, and in a way that pertains more to its relation to the rational faculties, sense moves as a perceiver and a reporter, supplying the rational soul with the basic materials of knowledge as, in a way, of pre-rational sense images. Wallace is helpful on this point:

> [The senses] report the "species" of things. With this idea we confront the nature of sense perception, particularly that point or moment at which sensation is thought to become meaningful, at which experience first takes

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[163] Bacon, "New Organon," 192.

[164] Francis Bacon, "*Sylvia Sylvarum*," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, vol. II (New York, NY: Garrett Press, 1968), 430.

> on form and shape, at which experience is organized and becomes a "this" and not a "that."[165]

More than merely receiving a quantity of data in need of subsequent organization, however, the senses are also capable of receiving certain essential qualities, or 'natures' communicated by the things themselves. Referring particularly to the eye and the ear, which take precedence in his account, Bacon remarks, for example, that

> The species of visibles seem to be emissions of beams from the objects seen; almost like odours; save that they are more incorporeal: but the species of audibles seem to participate more with local motion, like percussions or impressions made upon the air. So that whereas all bodies do seem to work in two manners; either by the communication of their natures, or by the impressions and signatures of their motions; the diffusion of species visible seemeth to participate more of the former operation, and the species audible of the latter.[166]

Statements like this serve to both elaborate and explain Bacon's insistence on the ability of the inductive method to be able to grasp the truth of the thing in itself.[167]

Sense, then, functions as a reporter of the natural world. In perceiving essences, however, the senses remain blind to the formal and final. Unable to discern the ultimate nature of things, sense is nonetheless capable of making out the essential *limits* of things that distinguish them from others. In a word, Sense is responsible for initial recognitions, not of substance, but rather of identity. These recognitions, however, are not in and of themselves intelligible, and so, before being considered and judged by Reason, must first pass through the faculty of understanding. Although identified as one of the six faculties of the rational soul, a systematic account of its activities is in large part absent from Bacon's account. In fact, all that we are able to even vaguely infer is that understanding somehow pertains to the translation of what Bacon calls "spiritual species," or the actual forms of concrete reality that are communicated to the senses, and what Wallace calls "intelligible species,"[168] or abstract forms that can be used by the thinking processes of

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[165] Wallace, *Nature of Man*, 44.

[166] Bacon, "*Sylvia Sylvarum*," 430.

[167] Bacon, "New Organon," 49.

[168] Wallace, *Nature of Man*, 102.

the rational soul. What this exactly entails, i.e. the differences in natures between the spiritual and the intelligible, is unclear. What is clear, however, is that it tends toward abstraction—a process necessary for deliberation—and so runs the risk of losing contact with the essences of the sensible world it wishes to communicate:

> The human understanding is of its own nature prone to abstractions and gives a substance and reality to things which are fleeting. But to resolve nature into abstractions is less to our purpose than to dissect her into parts; as did the school of Democritus, which went further into nature than the rest. Matter rather than forms should be the object of our attention, its configurations and changes of configuration, and simple action, and law of action or motion; for forms are figments of the human mind, unless you will call those laws of action forms.[169]

For Bacon, then, Understanding is the faculty most specifically pertaining to deductive reasoning; yet, Bacon cautions against becoming overly reliant on the understanding, for it permits contact with the natural world only through a process of abstraction that loses sight of particularities. Left to its own devices, Understanding is prone to taking the easy route to knowledge, inventing worlds that it mistakes for the world in itself:

> The understanding left to itself takes the same course [...] in accordance with logical order. For the mind longs to spring up to positions of higher generality, that it may find rest there; and so after a little while wearies of experiment. But this evil is increased by logic, because of the order and solemnity of its disputations.[170]

By virtue of the fact that it serves to distance the rational soul from the natural world rather than drawing it nearer, Bacon excludes Understanding from the list of faculties involved in the production of legitimate knowledge, and so bases his division of human learning on but three:

> The best division of human learning is that derived from the three faculties of the rational soul, which is the seat of learning. History has reference to the Memory, poesy to the Imagination, and philosophy to Reason.[171]

Or elsewhere,

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[169] Bacon, "New Organon," 58.

[170] Ibid., 50.

[171] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 292.

> Wherefore from these three fountains, Memory, Imagination, and Reason, flow these three emanations, History, Poesy, and Philosophy; and there can be no others.[172]

As a separate faculty from Understanding, Reason involves the consideration of, and deliberation upon, notions already abstracted from sense impressions. It is neither abstractive nor inventive, but rather evaluative, involving the application of logical procedures with the aim of determining the validity of propositions, which is to say, truth. Reason does not direct sense experience directly, however, and so relies on other faculties for its material. As we have seen, Reason functions deductively when it receives its materials from Understanding:

> Philosophy discards individuals; neither does it deal with the impressions immediately received from them, but with abstract notions derived from these impressions; in the composition and division whereof according to the law of nature and fact its business lies. And this is the office and work of Reason.[173]

Yet, Reason may also function *inductively*, and to this extent is not wholly reliant upon abstract Understanding, but rather also receives materials from the imagination: "For sense sends all kinds of images over to imagination for reason to judge of."[174]

Charged with the task of communicating between the senses, Memory, Understanding, and Reason, the Imagination functions through the production of tangible images before the mind as if they were before the eye. Although a faculty of *re*-presentation, and so a process involving imitation of a thing rather than the thing itself, Imagination is nonetheless capable of maintaining the concrete and tangible character of original sense images. In re-presenting rather than abstracting, Imagination is therefore able to maintain and communicate the particularity of sense experience to Reason in a way that Understanding cannot. Furthermore, to the extent that the power of representation resides solely in the Imagination, it is here that language is made possible:

> To the extent that [other psychological processes] became available as discourse, rather than through spirit (human or divine) or in other

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[172] Ibid., 293.

[173] Ibid., 292.

[174] Ibid., 406.

> nondiscursive, immediate ways, they must appear as material and form....Abstractly considered, the organ of discourse is grammar; concretely considered, the organ of discourse is speech and writing....In brief, the sound images of voice and speech and the visual images of language written are the simplest and most pervasive products of imagination.[175]

Language, then, is produced through the cooperation of Imagination, which provides the images, and Reason, which provides the grammar:

> Reason and reasoning were at work whenever one analyzed, compared, contrasted, and combined items of experience. These activities always involved the handling of ideas and images in a time sequence, and sequential activity always entailed ordering and placing. In a word, the activity was discursive.[176]

Lexicon and Grammar, this discursive quality of the relationship between Imagination and Reason is what privileges them over others in Bacon's account.

Although privileging Imagination over Understanding, Bacon is still ambivalent about the role of the Imagination and, at times, even hostile toward it. First, while necessary, Imagination, like Understanding, is somewhat prone to being carried away to the point of losing sight of actual things and events. Describing poesy, or that division of learning that finds it origin in the Imagination,

> Poesy, in the sense in which I have defined the word, is also concerned with individuals; that is, with individuals invented in imitation of those which are the subject of true history; yet with this difference, that it commonly exceeds the measure of nature, joining at pleasure things which in nature would never have come together, and introducing things which in nature would never have come to pass; just as Painting likewise does. This is the work of Imagination.[177]

At times Bacon refers to the products of the imagination as dream-like,[178] or akin to the theatre,[179] or, diminutively, "for imagination hardly produces sciences; poesy (which in

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[175] Wallace, *Nature of Man*, 71.

[176] Ibid., 116.

[177] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 292.

[178] Ibid., 336.

[179] Ibid., 335.

the beginning was referred to imagination) being to be accounted rather as a pleasure or play of wit than a science."[180] Imagination, then, more than the producer of images, is the producer of *pleasurable* images and, as such, functions in Bacon's account as more than a messenger, but rather as a persuader. Given its power to fashion images, the Imagination also has the power to represent things pleasurably or painfully, and so to subtly compel the Reason through an indirect and obscured consideration of desire.

Carrying with it such powers of persuasion, Imagination is, in fact, equal in power to Reason in compelling human beings to voluntary action:

> Neither is the imagination simply and only a messenger; but it is either invested with or usurps no small authority in itself, besides the simple duty of the message. For it was well said by Aristotle, "That the mind has over the body that commandment which the lord has over a bondman; but that reason has over the imagination that commandment which a magistrate has over a free citizen," who may also come to rule in his turn.[181]

The Imagination, then, operates at two points in the journey from sense to voluntary action. First, as we have seen, "sense sends all kinds of images over to imagination for reason to judge of.[182]" Second, however, it is the imagination that has the final say, and so the power of veto before the judgments of Reason are put into action: "and reason again when it has made its judgment and selection, sends them over to imagination before the decree be put into execution. For voluntary motion is ever preceded and incited by imagination."[183] Motivated by the pursuit of pleasure rather than the determination of validity, however, it is vital for Bacon that Reason occupy the ruling position lest determinations be made based more on pleasing fantasies than valid reasons. Imagination, says Bacon, is too easily persuaded and mislead by the imaginative speech of others:

> And again it is no small dominion which imagination holds in persuasions that are wrought by eloquence; for when by arts of speech men's minds

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[180] Ibid., 406.

[181] Ibid.

[182] Ibid., 405-406.

[183] Ibid., 406.

> are soothed, inflamed, and carried hither and thither, it is all done by stimulating the imagination till it becomes ungovernable, and not only sets reason at naught, but offers violence to it, partly by blinding, partly by incensing it.[184]

As a result, Bacon advocates the primacy of Reason which, in contrast to Imagination, is not a despot, but a kind magistrate that would hear Imagination's voice, heed its pleadings, then finally use it as an instrument to carry out determinations that, while "less delightful to the taste and palate of most minds,"[185] are nonetheless more nutritive:

> But this same "dry light" parches and offends most men's soft and watery natures. But to speak truly of things as they are in worth, rational knowledges are the keys of all other arts. And as the hand is the instrument of instruments, and the mind is the form of forms, so these are truly said to be the arts of arts. Neither do they only direct, but likewise confirm and strengthen; even as the habit of shooting not only enables one to take a better aim, but also to draw a stronger bow.[186]

As we have seen, Bacon is not in the habit of speculating about transcendentals, yet this does not dissuade him here from assuming, as in the medieval conception, the convertibility of the *verum* and the *bonum*, the true and the good.

Our extensive consideration of Reason and Imagination, one whose significance will become apparent in the following chapter, has left us but to consider the final of Bacon's three privileged thinking faculties, and the one with which this chapter, and this work, are ultimately concerned: Memory. And, what will perhaps be surprising, is that, after the powers of abstraction, invention, and judgment have been located elsewhere, there is little left for Memory to do except record and store the products it receives from Sense, Understanding, Reason, and Imagination. On the subject of natural memory, Bacon is relatively silent for, as Wallace explains, Bacon was writing from within a scholarly milieu that simply took it for granted:

> Memory received and preserved the work of the intellect and the imagination, as well as the work of the senses. Bacon almost ignores this function of memory, for he assumed what his contemporaries did, namely,

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[184] Ibid.

[185] Ibid., 407.

[186] Ibid.

> that unless the human mechanism could retain intellectual experience it could not function in ways that were distinctively human.[187]

For Wallace, the fact that Bacon seems to have taken the natural powers of memory for granted serves to explain why he "writes more about improving the memory than he does about its operations."[188] What is more likely, however, and what can be discerned from his comments on history and artificial memory, is that Bacon finds natural memory deficient, and unnecessarily limiting to the advancement of knowledge. When considered in this way, Bacon's discussions about artificial memory, are not so much about improving memory, as Wallace suggests, but are rather concerned with *replacing* it with artificial structures, both internal and external, that would more effectively permit the organization, retrieval, sharing, and advancement of knowledge.

For example, where Reason pertains to philosophy, and Imagination to poesy, Bacon builds the division of history on the model of Memory:

> History is properly concerned with individuals, which are circumscribed by time and place. For though Natural History may seem to deal with species, yet this is only because of the general resemblances which in most cases natural objects of the species bear to one another; so that when you know one, you know all....All this related to memory.[189]

More generally speaking, history, in Bacon's sense, consists of a cataloguing of true events in the form of registers and calendars. To this extent, history includes, not just the civil, but also events observed in nature as well as the results of human interventions through systematic experimentation. History is the memory of the world, for in it consists an organized record of all past human experiences, which can be accessed and applied to new problems as they arise. Speaking of the benefits of history to the furtherance of mechanical (or experimental) arts, for example, Bacon exclaims:

> For it will not only be of immediate benefit, by connecting and transferring the observations of one art to the use of others, and thereby discovering new commodities; a result which must needs follow when the experience of different arts shall fall under the observation and

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[187] Wallace, *Nature of Man*, 58.

[188] Ibid.

[189] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 292.

> consideration of one man's mind; but further, it will give a more true and real illumination concerning the investigation of causes of things and axioms of arts, than has hitherto shone upon mankind.[190]

From this passage it is easy to identify the main deficiency of natural memory: its incommunicability (see Plato's *Phaedrus*). Limited to 'one man's mind,' memory becomes limited, first, to that quantity of information that can be accumulated in a single lifetime. More than this, however, access to the memory of others is not absolute, but rather subject to the other's will. Lastly, since natural memory stores information from Imagination and Sense *in addition to* Reason, since it is non-discerning about the material that it admits into its storehouse, its recollections are unavoidably suspect. To the extent that we rely solely on natural memory, or, worse yet, insist on structuring our histories on the model of natural memory, admitting materials seemingly at random, without discernment, and without being properly ordered, Bacon argues that we cannot expect learning to advance. What is needed, then, are techniques of artificial memory, developed in accordance with Reason, that would be discerning, well-ordered, and common.

The Written Art of Memory

The first and most important form of artificial memory for Bacon—variously referred to as digests, calendars, tables and registers—are written accounts of events that, as external and permanent, can be accessed at will, by oneself and by others, and with confidence as to their validity.

> The great help to the memory is writing; and it must be taken as a rule that memory without this aid is unequal to matters of much length and accuracy; and that its unwritten evidence ought by no means be allowed. This is particularly the case in inductive philosophy and the interpretation of nature; for a man might as well attempt to go through the calculations of an Ephemeris in his head without the aid of writing, as to master the interpretation of nature by the natural and naked force of thought and memory, without the help of tables duly arranged.[191]

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[190] Ibid., 298.

[191] Ibid., 435.

As we have discussed, Bacon views natural memory as in and of itself deficient, representing a limit to the progress of knowledge, and so to human advancement. As such, Bacon strongly advocates writing as a way of overcoming the structural limitations otherwise imposed by "the natural and naked force of thought and memory."

These written digests take two forms in Bacon's account, one individual, one communal. On the level of the individual, Bacon advocates the use of commonplace books to establish organized journals document personal accumulations of knowledge. Bacon's comments on the role of writing as an aid to memory are such that they here warrant an extended citation:

> But not to speak of the interpretation of nature, which is a new doctrine, there can hardly be anything more useful even for the old and popular sciences, than a sound help for memory; that is a good and learned Digest of Common Places. I am aware indeed that the transferring of the things we read and learn into common-place books is thought by some to be detrimental to learning, as retarding the course of the reader and inviting the reader to take a holiday. Nevertheless, as it is but a counterfeit thing in knowledge to be forward and pregnant, except a man be also deep and full, I hold diligence and labour in the entry of common places to be a matter of great use and support in studying; as that which supplies matter to invention, and contracts the sight of judgement to a point.[192]

Emerging as a fully defined literary form in the Renaissance under humanists and theologians like Desiderius Erasmus and Philip Melanchthon,[193] commonplace books have, historically, "served as storehouses of knowledge in the form of personal, and often quite revealing manuscripts and as general works of reference in print. In the latter form, commonplace books counted among the early modern progenitors of the encyclopedia, concordance, and book of quotations."[194] Normally maintained for personal use, the books consisted of a number of headings under which facts and quotations could be organized and stored according to the idiosyncratic purposes of their users. Traditional

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[192] Ibid.

[193] Earle Havens, ""of Common Places, or Memorial Books": An Anonymous Manuscript on Commonplace Books and the Art of Memory in Seventeenth-Century England," *Yale University Library Gazette* 76, no. 3/4 (2002): 141.

[194] Ibid., 140.

commonplace headings included love, divinity, politics, and vanity,[195] but, in spite of efforts on the part of educators to standardize their structure and methods, the personal nature of such books meant that their headings and arrangement varied widely in popular use.

What is apparent in Bacon's discussion of commonplace books is a keen awareness of the attacks launched against their use, of the fact that (echoing Plato's comments in the *Phaedrus*) a reliance on commonplace books led to a deterioration of natural memory.[196] Bacon does not deny, but rather firmly believes that the benefits of an external written memory more than outweigh its detriments. If memory is to be an aid to Reason, as few of Bacon's contemporaries would deny, then the quality of Reason's judgments will increase in direct proportion to the amount of valid information it has at its disposal. If the end be valid judgment, then memory ought to be enhanced in all ways possible for, to repeat Bacon, "it is but a counterfeit thing in knowledge to be forward and pregnant, except a man be also deep and full."[197]

What interests Bacon the most about commonplace books is the fact that they represent structures that not only aid in the efficient storage and retrieval of pertinent information, but also in the construction of arguments, or in the inductive movement of Reason from particular instances to general axioms. In the later sense, Bacon would see the headings found in commonplace books as "places of invention,"[198] which serve to limit the field of particulars relevant to the construction of a particular argument. To this extent, the use of common places is, for Bacon, akin to hunting a wild animal from within a limited enclosure:

> For the hunting of any wild animal may be called a finding of it, as well in an enclosed park as in a forest at large. But not to be nice about words, let it be clearly understood, that the scope and end of this invention is

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[195] Ibid., 142.

[196] Karl R. Wallace, *Francis Bacon on Communication & Rhetoric* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina press, 1943), 159.

[197] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 435.

[198] Ibid., 422.

> readiness and present use of our knowledge, rather than addition or amplification thereof.[199]

Bacon sees these common places as being akin to *topics* which, in the tradition of rhetoric, represent the *place* of overlap between otherwise disparate propositions, the inventions of 'middle terms' to connect propositions in order to construct an argument. Considered in terms of the syllogism, for example, Aristotle explains that "Thus it results that in all our searches we seek either if there is a middle term or what the middle term is. For the middle term is the explanation, and in all cases it is the explanation which is being sought."[200] As we have seen, Bacon rejected the use of the syllogism as a means by which to discovery anything truly novel;[201] yet, he maintains the use of topics as middle terms necessary to the inductive movement from instances to axioms. Adopting a more Ciceroian view of topics, as "places for perception, discovery, and explanation of the unknown,"[202] the headings of commonplace books functioned as middle terms between the problem to be solved, and the universe of particulars to which it could refer in search of a solution: "The place where a thing is to be looked for may be marked, and as it were indexed; and this is what I call *Topics*."[203]

More than merely aiding in the efficient recollection of pertinent knowledge through a limiting of the field, however, Bacon also suggests that topics may function as 'middle terms' between the intellect and the world it experiences through the sense:

> The same places therefore which will help us to shake out the folds of the intellect within us, and to draw forth knowledge stored therein, will also help us to gain knowledge from without; so that if a man of learning and experience were before us, we should know how to question him wisely and to the purpose; and in like manner how to select and peruse with

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[199] Ibid., 435.

[200] Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, trans. Jonathan Barnes, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 48.

[201] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 428-429.

[202] Richard McKeaon, "The Uses of Rhetoric in a Technological Age: Architectonic Productive Arts," in *Rhetoric: Essays in Invention and Discovery*, ed. Mark Backman (Woodbridge, CT: Ox Bow Press, 1987), 31.

[203] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 422.

> advantage those authors, books, and parts of books, which may best instruct us concerning what we seek.[204]

Topics, then, mediate between the intellect and the world by establishing limits around what is and what is not a legitimate line of inquiry. They allow us to limit our questions—of individuals, literature, and, presumably nature—to those that are most likely to yield pertinent information. A well-crafted commonplace book, for example, will aid its author not only in efficiently recalling pertinent information, but also in discerning its legitimacy and importance, for only information that may be placed—i.e. things that are 'on topic'—will be recorded and recalled; all else is excluded as unimportant, and so as a kind of non-knowledge.

As Bacon observes, however, the private nature of commonplace books is such that it reduces their validity and application:

> But yet it is true that of the methods and frameworks of common places which I have hitherto seen, there is none of any worth; all of them carrying in their titles merely the face of a school and not of a world; and using vulgar and pedantic divisions, not such as pierce to the pith and heart of things.[205]

Bacon, therefore, identifies the most significant deficiency pertaining to the use of commonplace books, not in their essence, but rather in the methods advocated by his contemporaries. The topical divisions of commonplace books are, indeed, useful in storing and efficiently locating relevant material, but what good is technique if the divisions used fail to coincide with those found in nature? If artificial memory establishes a limit to material available in the construction of arguments, and also to the kind of information that will be admitted as legitimate knowledge, it is vital, suggests Bacon, that the limits be put in the correct places. By introducing a kind of correspondence theory of knowledge into his account, Bacon provides a justification for the systematic production of history, as a kind of master commonplace book: encyclopaedic in scope, organized by topics coinciding with the divisions found in nature, and so used and accepted by all.

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[204] Ibid., 423.

[205] Ibid., 435.

History, then, becomes in Bacon's account a communal and universal written art of memory. As he argues in the *Delineatio* on the interpretation of nature,

> The memory-aids perform the following function: they help one to draw up a particular history whose parts are disposed in a particular order from the immense multitude of particular facts and from the mass of general natural history. The order of the particular history makes it easier for the intellect to work on the materials and execute its proper functions...Firstly, the things to be investigated for a given problem should be set out in the same way that one sets out a topica. Secondly, one should set out how, and at what moment, the research will be integrated and the preceding pages or tables transposed onto new tables...The ministration ad memoriam therefore consists of three doctrines: the invention of loci, the method of tabulation and the method of beginning the research.[206]

As should be immediately apparent, save for establishing strict conditions of validity, Bacon's discussion of the use of memory aids with respect to his method for producing histories and interpreting nature is identical to his discussion of commonplace books. What is significant, however, is that in the move from personal compendium to universal history, Bacon makes a shift from the art of memory as a strictly mnemonic technique, to using it as the foundation of a new system of scientific knowledge. As Rossi observes,

> In his substitution of a collection of natural loci for the collection of rhetorical loci, his unconventional use of the art of memory, and his conception of the tabulae as a means of ordering reality in which the memory prepares an 'organized reality' for the operations of the intellect, Bacon had introduced into his logic of scientific knowledge, some of the typical elements of the rhetorical-dialectical tradition.[207]

The externalization of memory through the production of commonplace books and histories is clearly of central importance to Bacon's new logic of scientific knowledge. The reason for this, however, is not strictly utilitarian. Written memory is not merely a convenient tool of the intellect, acting in harmony and cooperation with the natural faculty of Memory. As Bacon acknowledges, but does not refute, commonplace

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[206] Francis Bacon, "*Partis Instaurationis Secundae Delineato Et Argumentum*," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, vol. III (New York, NY: Garrett Press, 1968). Translated in Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory*, p. 119.

[207] Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory*, 122-123.

books invite the Memory to take a holiday; nor is this fact lamented, for the usurping of the position of natural memory by the written actually serves to reconfigure the rational soul, technologizing it in such a way as to be more conducive to the demands of the new logic.

In contrast to the natural faculty of memory, which is undiscerning about the materials it accepts into itself—admitting information from Sense, Imagination, Understanding, and Reason—and which in and of itself is lacking organization—relying on the Imagination to construct intelligible images and persuasive arguments—written memory, may be structured systematically through Reason. In contrast to natural memory to which Reason may contribute materials, but over which Reason has no other power of influence, written memory may be established as an arm of Reason and in such a way as to confine and limit the activities of the Imagination. To be sure, Imagination is always involved in the invention of topics, as is evidenced by Bacon's observation that they tend to be representative of a school rather than of the world. Yet, where Reason is able to judge the validity of topics admitted into commonplace books and histories, it limits Imagination's ability to construct general topics, or the basic categories of thought. Furthermore, once established and ossified, these categories further limit the reign of the Imagination, and so on and so forth. More than this, to the extent that the natural faculty of Memory is retarded, and usurped by a written memory governed by Reason, Imagination is made increasingly reliant on the materials of Reason for its inventions. The externalization of memory through writing, then becomes a means of progressively enclosing not just the wild animals of knowledge, but also the hunter Imagination and, to this extent, Imagination is constrained by Reason; mastered as an instrument of its will.

The Art of Memory as a Writing

As we have seen, Bacon seems in many ways intent on diminishing the internal powers of natural memory and replacing them with an artificial written memory, through the systematic construction of commonplace books and histories. His suspicion of internal memory, however, is further evidenced by his disdain for received methods for strengthening it, which Bacon identifies as being more suited for ostentation than for use:

> For the Memory itself, the inquiry seems hitherto to have been pursued weakly and languidly enough. An art there is indeed extant of it; but it is clear to me that there might be both better precepts for strengthening and enlarging the memory than that art contains, and a better practice of the art itself than that which is received.[208]

Providing a list of abuses of the art of memory, including things like being able to recite a long list of words after a single hearing, Bacon concludes by saying that "all such things I esteem no more than I do the tricks and antics of clowns and rope-dancers. For they are almost the same things; the one an abuse of the powers of the body, the other of the mind; matters perhaps of strangeness, but of no worthiness.[209] In light of these harsh criticisms, then, Bacon proceeds offer some basic guidelines for a useful art of memory, guidelines that, as Yates observes, go a long way in preventing its use for all kinds of ostentation.[210] Bacon's art of memory consists of two elements: prenotions and emblems:

> This art of memory is but built upon two intentions; the one prenotion, the other emblem. Prenotion dischargeth the indefinite seeking of that we would remember, and directeth us to seek in a narrow compass, that is, somewhat that hath congruity with our place of memory. Emblem reduceth conceits intellectual to images sensible, which strike the memory more.[211]

To the extent that his art of memory consists of these two elements—indeed, to the extent that he refers explicitly to the art of memory—Bacon deliberately locates himself within a long rhetorical tradition concerned with the development of artificial memory

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[208] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 436.

[209] Ibid.

[210] As Yates argues, Bacon also constructs his art of memory in opposition to a renaissance mystical tradition that would seek to explore the ultimate unity of the universe through a symbolic recreation of its ideal relationships in memory: "The art of memory has here indeed been reformed from the 'ostentatious' uses by rhetoricians bent of impressing by their wonderful memories and turned to serious business. And amongst the ostentatious uses which are to be abolished in the reformed use of the art Bacon certainly has in mind the occult memories of the Magi....To Bacon such schemes might well have seemed 'enchanted glass' full of distorting 'idola', and far from that humble approach to nature in observation and experiment which he advocated. (Yates, *Art of Memory*, 372.)

[211] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 436.

techniques. As is well recognized, the art of memory tradition originates with the poet Simonides of Ceos (*circa* 556 to 468 BC).[212] According to numerous sources, there was a certain banquet whose guests were tragically killed after the roof of the banquet hall suddenly fell in on them. Simonides, who was in attendance at the banquet, but who happened to step out just before the event, was able, so the story goes, to identify the otherwise unrecognizable bodies by remembering the places the guests had occupied. As Cicero explains,

> Prompted by this experience, he is then said to have made the discovery that order is what most brings light to our memory. And he concluded that those who would like to employ this part of their abilities should choose localities, then form mental images of things they want to store in their memory, and place these in the localities. In this way, the order of the localities would preserve the order of the things, while the images would represent the things themselves; and we would use the localities like a wax tablet, and the representations like the letters written on it.[213]

Since Simonides, then, the art of memory tradition has relied, in various forms and for various reasons, on the need for two elements: places and images. Intimately familiar with this tradition,[214] Bacon appropriates its two elements and, renaming them in *Advancement of Learning*, re-labels them 'prenotions' and 'emblems' respectively.

To the extent that prenotions serve to 'narrow our compass' and limit what would otherwise be an indefinite seeking after information in memory, they are akin to topics which, we will recall, serve to 'cut infinity' and so limit Imagination's hunt amidst the vast field of empirical particulars.

Elaborating on what he means by prenotion, Bacon explains:

> ...when a man desires to recall anything into his memory, if he have no prenotion or perception of that he seeks, he seeks and strives and beats about hither and thither as if in infinite space. But if he have some certain

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[212] Yates, *Art of Memory*, 27ff.

[213] Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator (De Oratore)*, trans. James M. May and Jakob Wisse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 219.

[214] Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), 206; Wallace, *Francis Bacon on Communication and Rhetoric*, 156 & 214; Yates, *Art of Memory*, 370.

> prenotion, this infinity is at once cut off, and the memory ranges in a narrower compass; like the hunting of a deer within an enclosure.[215]

Like topics, prenotions function as a framework for organizing information, structuring the otherwise unlimited field of particulars in such a way as to put them to good use. In fact, when it comes to memory, Bacon uses the language of topics, prenotions, and memory places interchangeably. In the *New Organon*, Bacon clearly lays out what he means by prenotions, providing examples of what can be used in this capacity:

> topics of "places" in artificial memory…may either be places in the proper sense of the word, as a door, angle, window, and the like; or familiar and known persons; or any other things at pleasure (provided they be placed in a certain order), as animals, vegetables; words too, letters characters, historical persons, and the like[216]

What is striking here is that his criteria are not substantial. He does not lay out strict rules for constructing memory places, but rather describes them functionally, and so allows for just about anything to mark a division in memory. In contrast to those in the art of memory tradition who laid out strict rules for establishing memory places, Bacon insists that they can take any form, provided that they are 'organized in a certain order,' and are discrete, or to use Bacon's words, "clear and certain."[217]

It must be said that Bacon's art of memory does not, strictly speaking, introduce anything new to the tradition. As far as memory places are concerned, for example, his insistence upon order is anything but unconventional, for as is evident from narratives surrounding Simonides, order and distinction have been recognized as crucial from the very beginning.

Complementary to prenotions, but equally important to the art of memory, Bacon describes what he means by emblems as follows:

> Emblem, on the other hand, reduces intellectual conceptions to sensible images; for an object of sense always strikes the memory more forcibly and is more easily impressed upon it than an object of the intellect.[218]

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[215] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 436.

[216] Bacon, "New Organon," 162.

[217] Ibid.

[218] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 437.

Emblems, according to Bacon, are representational, involving a translation of ideas into objects that can be sensed, or rather, seen: "We find in the art of memory, that images visible work better than other conceits: as if you would remember the word *philosophy*, you shall more surely do it by imagining that such a man (for men make the best places) is reading upon Aristotle's Physics; than if you should imagine him to say, *I'll go study philosophy*. And therefore this observation would be translated to the subject we now speak of (the card trick): for the more lustrous the imagination is, it filleth and fixeth better."[219] Emblems, then, are simply the products of the imagination, which, as we have seen from Bacon's account of the rational faculties, is responsible for the translation of the pre-rational images of sense, and the abstractions of understanding, into tangible images that can be used and considered before the eye of Reason. Furthermore, in spite of his harsh criticisms of the contemporary art of memory tradition, Bacon's own views on emblems are, for the most part, derivative, drawing heavily upon the renaissance perspective. As Rossi observes, "Bacon's views on memory, then, appear to have been profoundly influenced by earlier discussions of the nature of signs and images. But Bacon's debt to the Renaissance tradition of the *ars memorativa* is seen most clearly in the *New Organon* where he uses the 'techniques' developed by the theorists of artificial memory, but also augments them with the new rules and new psychological insights of his own."[220] In the passage of the *New Organon* to which Rossi refers, Bacon sets out three criteria relevant for constructing effective emblems in and for memory:

> whatever brings the intellectual conception into contact with the sense (which is indeed the method most used in mnemonics) assists memory....things which make their impression by way of a strong affection, as by inspiring fear, admiration, shame, delight, assist the memory....things which are chiefly imprinted when the mind is clear and not occupied with anything else.[221]

Emblems, argues Bacon, should be sensible, striking, and clear and, to this extent, there is no significant difference between Bacon's comments about images and those basic

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[219] Bacon, "*Sylva Sylvarum*," 659.

[220] Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory*, 109.

[221] Bacon, "New Organon," 163.

criteria that have characterized the art of memory tradition as a whole. These three criterion were, in fact, the very criteria set out by the author of the *ad Herenium*, an anonymous rhetoric textbook completed in Rome *circa* 86 – 82 BC.[222]

> We ought, then, to set up images of a kind that can adhere longest in memory. And we shall do so if we establish similitudes as striking as possible; if we set up images that are not many or vague but active (*imagines gentes*); if we ornament some of them, as with crowns or purple cloaks, so that the similitude may be more distinct to us; or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that its form is more striking, or by assigning certain comic effects to our images, for that, too, will ensure our remembering them more readily.[223]

When compared against Bacon's comments on the natural work of the imagination, however, we find that Bacon's suggestions for the construction of emblems differ in no way substantially from what Imagination merely does as a matter of course. In spite of the fact that Bacon's art of memory is rather derivative, reforming contemporary arts of memory through a return to the ways it was first conceived, its insistence on the use of artificial prenotions as a way of limiting the otherwise natural activity of Imagination is, once again symptomatic of Bacon's desire to constrain the imagination, blocking its ability to rule the rational soul, and maintain it as an instrument of Reason.

For Bacon, then, the art of memory does not in fact function as a method for strengthening the natural faculty of memory, as he suggests, but rather as a way of co-opting it to better serve the interest of Reason. Identifying the deficiencies of natural memory relative to the systematic accumulation of valid knowledge, Bacon advocates the development of an external written form of memory, which permits of a greater potential for quantity, organization, and communicability. Deficient in itself, Bacon is unconcerned about the weakening of natural memory that an over-reliance on the written might promote. Having rendered the natural memory impotent, however, Bacon proceeds to structure the internal memory on the model of the written, internalizing the

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[222] Yates, *Art of Memory*, 4.

[223] Qtd. in Yates, *Art of Memory*, 10.

strict topical logic that he has established for commonplace books and for histories, and so completing his jailing of Imagination by limiting its movements to only those that would assist the 'dry light' of Reason

CHAPTER 3

VICO'S ART OF MEMORY

The concept of human nature is one that suffers from the unfortunate problem of being among the most central and ambiguous notions in Vico's thought. On the one hand, as far as its centrality is concerned, Vico is perhaps nowhere more explicit than in his first inaugural oration, delivered at the University of Naples on 18 October, 1699:

> Among the many wisest precepts that are practiced in order to achieve happiness in life, the one that seems to have been made totally for that purpose and stands in every way as the most important is expressed in two short words and has been immortalized by antiquity in golden letters on Apollo's temple in Delphi. This is: "Know thyself."[224]

Vico here makes a case for the primacy of self-knowledge in motivating and making possible knowledge about the rest of the world: "As a sphere rotates on its axis, so does my argument hinge on this: knowledge of oneself is for everyone the greatest incentive to acquire the universe of learning in the shortest possible time."[225]

This is a theme that Vico maintains through the *New Science*, but nonetheless appears hesitant to provide a clear and consistent account of what it is, exactly, that he means. In his first inaugural oration, for example, Vico invokes, not one, but two human natures, which he equates with the desires for immediate pleasure on the one hand,[226] and for truth on the other.[227] In contrast, Vico's second oration is telling of his platonic roots, associating human nature, not fundamentally with a duality at the heart of human desire, but rather with an ordering of the soul according to right reason;

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[224] Giambattista Vico, "Oration I: On Self Knowledge," in *On Humanistic Education (Six Inaugural Orations, 1699-1707)*, ed. Donald Phillip Verene (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 38.

[225] Ibid., 37-38.

[226] "For our nature is so constituted that men are inclined to leisure rather than to labor and they shun difficulties and pursue easy things." (ibid., 35; *cf.* 51).

[227] "Nature, indeed, has made us for truth, natural disposition guides us, and wonder keeps us persistent" (Ibid., 49)

> Through knowledge the wise separates the spirit from the concerns of the body, thus allowing him to devote himself to the better and god-like part. He then can concern himself only when needed with the fragile and troublesome. Thus by inquiring into the nature of all things, by his mind he reaches God and in these meditations he finds delight and sustenance. By having rightly ordered his life he is aware that there are within us both desire and aversion, both virtue and vice, while on the outside there are body, riches, and glories. He knows that what is within us is by its nature free and serves him only, but what is on the outside of subservient and under an alien law.[228]

Here, instead of a drive-theory of human nature, Vico insists that a teleological approach is most appropriate. Modeled in the image of God, human nature is to progress with reason toward a well-ordered soul that would increase its proximity to the divine. Lastly, in his third oration, Vico once again shifts the locus of his attention, this time considering human nature as identical to the will:

> Man alone is whatever he chooses to be. He becomes whatever he desires to become. He does whatever pleases him....I believe that the entirety of things which is the world, if it had any awareness, would see man alone to be the director of his own actions while all other created things are nature's slaves.[229]

To some extent, Vico's ambiguous conception of human nature is to be expected from his early work. As evidence of a steep intellectual development, we cannot, as readers, expect Vico's early orations to reflect any kind of firm commitment. Yet, Vico's ambiguity apropos of human nature persists even into his *New Science*, with the result of frustrating commentators who would seek to discern an ossified and mature position. In a detailed analysis of Vico's notion of a 'state of nature,' for example, Costelloe comprehensively details, not only each explicit use of the term, but also textual instances where the concept is implicit. In cases of its explicit use, Costelloe observes that 'state of nature' is used on a number of occasions to refer, not to a singular human nature or originary moment in human history, but rather to a variety of states of nature, each

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[228] Giambattista Vico, "Oration II: On Virtue and Wisdom," in *On Humanistic Education (Six Inaugural Orations, 1699-1707)*, ed. Donald Phillip Verene (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 69.

[229] Vico, "Oration III," 74.

corresponding to different states of civil development. Although Vico lacks consistency in his usage of the term, he uses it most frequently to refer to "a stage of development under the *famuli*, after the universal Flood but prior to the rise of complex social institutions and the founding of cities."[230] In cases where a point of origin is implied, however, Costelloe claims that Vico's state of nature refers to a kind of beast-like state void of language, law, and institution.[231]

Human nature, then, is a well established problem within Vico studies. Dismissing the lack of clarity in Vico's early writing, however, Costelloe, Mazlish[232] and Blasi[233] each argue that the problem of Vico's ambiguity is resolved if we read human nature, not as a kind of stable essence, but rather as developmental and, to this extent, Vico stands in opposition to the tradition of natural right that was, in Vico's time, still quite prevalent. In contrast to Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, who suggest static states of nature, and so a static referent by which to judge natural law, Vico describes human nature as contingent and developmental. As Mazlish argues, "Vico's break with natural law allowed him to see that humanity evolved; and he traced this evolution in a naturalistic, empirical manner."[234] Reading Vico in light of Mazlish, and through the lens of developmental psychology, Blasi further explains that "human nature, in Vico's *New Science*, consists in a well-determined developmental pattern leading to a definite goal, pattern and goal being shared, as such, by all human beings."[235] Costelloe, too, recognizes in Vico an attempt to distance himself from the natural law tradition: "It should be noted straight away that Vico seems well aware of the natural law theorists' views on the state of nature and the place it occupies in their thought; and in what can be

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[230] Timothy M. Costelloe, "The Concept of "State of Nature" in Vico's "New Science"," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1999): 324; *cf.* footnote 9.

[231] Costelloe, "Concept of "State of Nature"," 324-325.

[232] Bruce Mazlish, *The Riddle of History: The Great Speculators from Vico to Freud* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

[233] Augusto Blasi, "Vico, Developmental Psychology, and Human Nature," *Social Research* 43, no. 4 (1976): 672-697.

[234] Mazlish, *Riddle of History*, 55.

[235] Blasi, "Vico, Developmental Psychology, and Human Nature," 690.

none other than an apparent attempts to distance himself from them, he makes no effort to define or circumscribe the 'state of nature' in any detailed way. Vico uses the term *consistently*, but does not intend it to be used univocally."[236]

Each of these accounts, then, reconcile Vico's apparent ambiguity by describing a human nature whose nature changes as it moves through each of Vico's three (four if we include a beastial state) stages of history. Where each of these accounts fall short, however, is in their failure to recognize a distinction in Vico's writing between human nature, consisting of certain stable and universal structures of the human mind, and its activity, which is necessarily a function of its social and cultural milieu. Following Vico's axiom that "Doctrines must take their beginning from that of the matters of which they treat,"[237] what follows is a description, not of how Vico conceives the activity of human beings, but rather of his conception of the structure of human nature that conditions the possibility of action in the first place.

Vico's Model of Human Nature

Contrary to Danesi's claim that "Vico himself never formulated a *theory* of mind as such," but, instead "left it up to his readers to synthesize his insights, thus allowing them their own *ingegni* to come up with, or 'discover,' a theory for themselves,"[238] Vico actually provides an account of tremendous lucidity in *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italian,* one that, mobilizing much of the same language as Bacon, is tacitly critical of Bacon's model in almost every respect. At the most basic level, Vico refuses to use the concept of the soul as a way of distinguishing the moving from the moved. As we have seen, Bacon is hesitant to admit as knowledge anything that is metaphysical or supersensible and, as such, makes the decision to 'give unto faith the things which are faiths.'[239] Excluding the religious as inherently uncertain, Bacon is nonetheless willing to

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[236] Costelloe, "Concept of "State of Nature"," 325.

[237] Vico, *New Science*, p. 92.

[238] Marcel Danesi, *Giambattista Vico and the Cognitive Science Enterprise* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 60-61.

[239] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning, II-VI," 477.

accept that the systematic study of nature is, in fact sufficient to refute atheism[240] and, in so doing, he grants the necessary assumption of a divine source of original motion.

A devout Catholic, educated in the Jesuit tradition, Vico accepts Bacon's claim to God as first mover, but goes farther, arguing not only that God is first, but also that he is the *only* source of motion;

> But anyone who understands that all things are moved by perpetual motion and that there is no rest in nature understands also that a body that seems to be at rest is not roused to motion by the impulse of the hand, but it is determined by a different type of motion. Indeed, it is not within our power to move anything. God alone originates all motion and arouses conatus, which is the beginning of motion. It is the determination of motion that is truly within our power. Other determinations arise from one kind of mechanism or another. Air is the mechanism common to all motions, and its pressure is God's perceptible hand, by which all things are moved.[241]

According to Vico, the condition of possibility of extension, or matter, is motion[242] and, as such, he eliminates the possibility of making the Baconian distinction between extant things on the basis of their motion. Likewise, Vico also refuses the language of self-movement. Since movement is necessary to existence in the first place, it is inaccurate to understand the world as if it were divided into the moving and moved. Instead, argues Vico, it is more appropriate to think of the world in terms of the categories of determined and determining, and it is on this basis that he posits the difference between human beings and brute.

In place of Bacon's bipartite division of the human soul into rational and irrational, Vico divides the human in terms of soul (*anima*) and spirit (*animus*). Vico's distinction is not totally without similarity to Bacon's. On the one hand, for example, Vico's *anima* refers to that which is "devoid of reason," determined rather than self-determining, and therefore typical of 'brutes.'[243] On the other hand, *animus* refers to that

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[240] Ibid.

[241] Vico, *Most Ancient Wisdom*, 83.

[242] Ibid., 76.

[243] Ibid., 87.

active aspect, unique to human beings, which moves freely,[244] and so conditions the possibility of meditation on truth, which is to say, reason.[245] Although characterized in terms of their capacity for reason, Vico nevertheless resists making rationality the basis for his division, for, although the soul's nature precludes the possibility of rationality, the spirit need not be rational either. Rather, the spirit's capacity to meditate on truth is limited by something far more fundamental, its proximity to the will of God. "Because it moves freely, the animus yearns for infinity and, hence, immortality....[M]an was created with an immortal spirit and was made immortal on God's own account."[246] Yearning for immortality, and created with God as its goal, the spirit is also caught in relation to the soul whose passions ever cloud and obscure its proverbial sight. Vico describes their relationship as follows:

> Certainly, the twin stimuli of all the perturbations, or feelings, of the soul are the appetites of desire and anger; blood seems to be in the vehicle of desire, bile of anger. The seat of both humors is in the vicinity of the heart. Consequently, [the ancient philosophers] would have held that the mind depends on the spirit because how one thinks reflects one's spiritual state, and men hold different opinions on the same subject because of their different concerns.

What is significant about the spirit, then, is not its capacity for rationality, but rather its position with respect to two mutually exclusive desires, infinity on the one hand, and the finite passions on the other. In this sense, the spirit's defining quality is its function as intermediary, seeking after God while ever confounded by the passions of the brute soul:

> Did the Romans make their solemn declarations with words like *videri* (seem) and *parere* (appear) and their oaths with *ex animi sui sentential* (according to the state of his spirit) because they thought that no one could make his spirit quite empty of passions, and because they had a religious awe in judging and swearing, lest they perjure themselves if matters stood otherwise than they thought?

Another respect in which Vico differs significantly from Bacon is in his insistence on the distinction between powers and faculties. In contrast to Bacon, who uses the two

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[244] Ibid., 86.

[245] Ibid., 89.

[246] Ibid., 86.

terms interchangeably, Vico reserves the term 'power' to describe that which does not exist, but which is necessary to ensure "the transition from potentialities into actualities."[247] For example, soul and spirit are powers because they are not extended. They do not consist in matter and so do not, properly speaking, exist. They are human equivalents to the divine *conatus*, or the power of motion whereby things first come into being. As Vico describes *conatus*, "conatus is not itself a thing but a 'way of being."[248] As "a kind of thing that is not extended and yet is capable of extension,"[249] *conatus* is the power to transform potentialities into actualities,[250] a metaphysical substance (quite literally 'beyond being') which is necessary for matter to contract its existence. Just as *conatus* provides the metaphysical substance out of which God effects existence, so, too, are the spirit and the soul metaphysical substances necessary for human beings to effect existence for themselves.

As powers, *anima* and *animus* may also be thought of as desires that precede the desiring subject. Just as God created light before the sun, the moon and the stars, so too did he create the desires of the subject before the subject that desires. What this means, in Vico's account, is that human beings are, at the most basic level of their (pre)existence, free willing agents, and it is for this reason that Vico describes human beings in terms of two opposing powers, one eternal, one ephemeral. If human beings were purely spirit, they would be unavoidably compelled toward the mind of God; yet, to this extent, the human will and capacity for creativity would be negated. Likewise, if purely soul, human beings would be no more than animals. In both cases the human capacity for self-determination is eliminated. A theme that is present throughout Vico's work, but which is initiated in the first of his inaugural orations, is the divinity that characterizes human cognition:

> In the same effort to know yourself, you perceive the divinity of your own spirit and recognize that it is the image of Almighty God. As God is known by those things that have been created and are contained within

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[247] Ibid., 77.

[248] Ibid., 74.

[249] Ibid., 76.

[250] Ibid., 77.

> this universe, so the spirit is recognized as divine by reason, in which it is pre-eminent, and by its sagacity, ability, memory, and ingenuity. The spirit is the most manifest image of God.[251]

Paradoxically, in order for human beings to be in the image of God, they must be constituted in such a way as to prevent absolute proximity between their wills and that of God. The conflicting desires, or powers, at the heart of the human being serve, therefore, to put an inescapable epistemological distance between human beings and the truth (*verum*). This distance, however, serves as the condition of possibility for free will and self-determination. For Vico, then, what is essential about human nature is not the

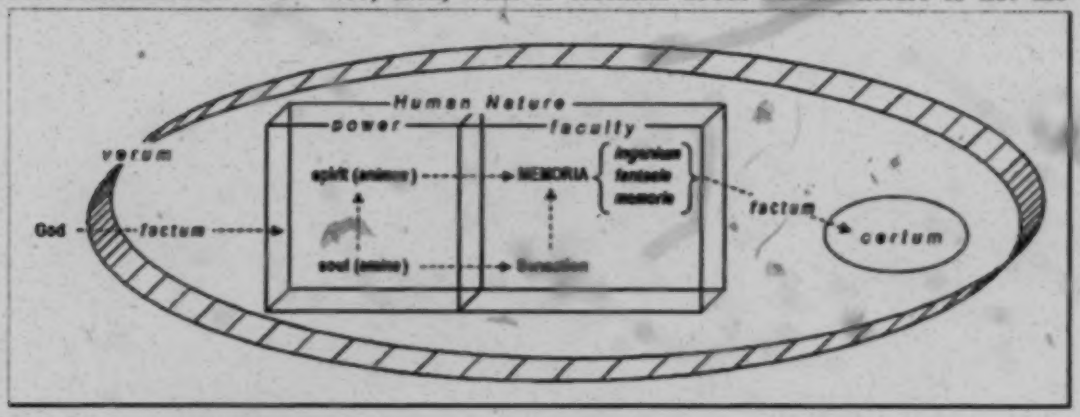

Figure 2. Vico's model of human nature

capacity for Reason and rationality, as is the case for Bacon, but rather the ambivalence of its powers whose dissonance is productive of its most basic and divine attribute: the capacity for creative determination.

Complementary to Vico's conception of power, is his notion of faculty as "the ability to turn power into action."[252]

> The word *facultas* is a contraction from *faculitas*, from which comes the later word *facilitas*, which signifies an unhindered and ready disposition for making (*facere*). Hence, faculty is the ability to turn power into action. The soul is power, sight an activity, and the sense of sight a faculty. Therefore, the scholastics speak quite elegantly when they call sensation, imagination, memory, and intellect the faculties of the soul.[253]

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[251] Vico, "Oration I," 40.

[252] Vico, *Most Ancient Wisdom*, 93.

[253] Ibid.

In contrast to Bacon who, we will recall, uses faculties as useful concepts for organizing the effects of the soul, Vico shows no hesitation in distinguishing faculty from activity, and in positing the former as a real objective cause of the latter, the ability through which creative possibility is transformed into productive activity.

Although shorter than Bacon's list of faculties, Vico's includes in his those faculties which feature most prominently in Bacon's account: sensation, imagination, memory, and intellect. The novel way in which Vico conceives of each of them, as well as their relation to one another, however, reveals a striking dissimilarity. Just as Bacon organizes the rational soul in such a way as to control the presumably devastating effects of imagination upon the faculty of reason, Vico organizes the mind in such a way as to privilege that very creativity that he claims lies at the heart of human subjectivity. More than this, however, Vico's organization serves as a devastating critique of Bacon's, for it not only places imagination ahead of reason, but also reveals reason, not as a true faculty, but rather as a kind of parasitic invader masquerading as a faculty in order to technologize the mind and restrict the creativity that lies at the heart of its true nature.

As abilities that transform possibilities into activity, faculties, in Vico's account, each represent a kind of making. When it comes to the senses, therefore, Vico's account is in absolute opposition to Bacon's, which insists upon the ability of the senses to receive certain qualities communicated by things in themselves:

> For if the senses are faculties, we make the colour of things by seeing, flavor by tasting, sound by hearing, and heat and cold by touching. An undistorted trace of this tenet of Italy's ancient philosophers survives in the words olere (to have a smell) and olfacere (to perceive a smell). For a thing is said to have a smell and the animate sense is said to perceive a smell because the sense makes the scent by smelling the smell (olfactus).[254]

The faculty of sensation, then, is productive of perceptions, and includes the typical five senses, which Vico calls external.[255] Relying on the organs of the body, these quite clearly operate under the purview of the soul, and so represent the most basic faculty, and

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[254] Ibid., 94.

[255] Ibid., 94-95.

one that is shared by animal and human being alike. Alone, its perceptions are immediate, ephemeral, and unintelligible and so, while necessary for the intellect, are not acts of intelligence as such. The movements of the sense organs are determined by, but not determining of, external stimuli, and so function outside of the will (hence 'external sensation') and human creativity.

Reliant upon perception, and yet "quite incorporeal," Vico opposes to the faculties of sense the faculties of the mind, or intellect. Now, in *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, Vico lists its three faculties separately. Memory (*memoria*), he says, is the faculty that stores and recalls sense perceptions.[256] Imagination (*fantasia*) receives perceptions from memory, and transforms them into images that can be used by the final faculty, ingenuity (*ingenium*), which judges the relationships between things. Even in this early work, however, Vico foreshadows what he would establish explicitly in the *New Science*, the fact that *memoria*, *fantasia*, and *ingenium* are not separate faculties, but rather three aspects of that single defining structure of the human mind, *MEMORIA*.

Although his position is not formalized until *On the Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, an interest in memory features prominently throughout even Vico's earliest works. Listing those divine attributes that characterize the human mind in his first inaugural oration, for example, Vico identifies perceiving, composing (*fantasia*), discriminating (*ingenium*), and reasoning.[257] Following Cicero, however, Vico exclaims, "I admire memory even more than phantasy. What, indeed, is there more divine than the most copious treasure chest of words and ideas of things in the human mind?"[258]

By the time of his final inaugural oration, published as *On the Study Methods of our Time*, Vico not only maintains his insistence of memory's importance, but also demonstrates significant movement toward his eventual position: "The teacher should give the greatest care to the cultivation of the pupil's memory, which, though not exactly the same as imagination, is almost identical with it."[259] Still maintaining a distinction

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[256] Ibid., 95.

[257] Vico, "Oration I," 44.

[258] Ibid., 47.

[259] Vico, *Study Methods*, 14.

between the faculties of memory and imagination, Vico here nevertheless betrays a reluctance to do so, and a desire to consider them as one in the same, as, in fact, he does in *Ancient Wisdom*:

> The Latins called the faculty that stores sense perceptions "memory"; when it recalls perceptions they call it "reminiscence." But memory also signified the faculty that fashions images (which Greeks call phantasy and the Italians call imaginative). For in ordinary Italian, immaginare is equivalent to the memorare of the Latins.[260]

On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians is significant with respect to the development of Vico's theory of memory because it is here that he first fully accepts and formalizes his view of the identity of *memoria* and *fantasia*. What is perhaps more significant than this, however, is that Vico here also takes steps to imply that *ingenium*, too, should be considered inseparable from memory, an aspect like *memoria* and *fantasia* in what would appear to be a trinitarian model of mind:

> So all ancient dialectic is divided into the art of discovery and that of judgment; the Academics were concerned only with the former, the Stoics only with the latter. Both were wrong, because there is no invention without judgment and no judgment without invention.[261]

In Vico's account, *fantasia* is that faculty whereby perceptions are divided and transformed into clear and distinct images for the intellect, and *ingenium* is that faculty whereby thought-images are compared and combined to form arguments and explanations. To this extent, *fantasia* is responsible for invention, and *ingenium* for judgment. Upon reflection, however, Vico discovers that the two are, of necessity, inseparable.

On the one hand, *ingenium* relies on the images of the imagination for, as should be obvious, it is only possible to establish relationships between things that are ready-constituted; one can not organize things that do not exist. On the other hand, however, Vico also anticipates what has since become a well-known paradox within the field of semiotics: the fact that it is impossible to define the limits of an object without appeal to its difference from other objects that it is not:

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[260] Vico, *Most Ancient Wisdom*, 95-96.

[261] Ibid., 100.

> For if defining means mapping the limits of things, and the limits are the edges of formed bodies, and all formed bodies are drawn out of matter by motion, then, since nature exists already, they must be referred to what has been accepted as already existing.[262]

Or, elsewhere he asks, "how can a clear and distinct idea of our mind be the criterion of truth unless it has seen through all [of the elements] that are in the things, or are germane to it? And how can anyone be certain that he has seen through all of them completely unless he has examined all the questions that can be asked about the matter at hand?"[263] The fact that neither activity, invention or judging, may take place in the absence of the other speaks not only to a lack of priority, but also to a kind of inseparability such that "by completing this process of questioning, topics itself will become criticism."[264]

Vico's thought on memory and its relation to human agency culminates in his *New Science*, where he finally forms a theory of mental faculties freed from ambiguity and uncertainty. In light of his other writing, however, and especially in the light of his metaphysical treatise *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, Vico feels no need to further argue its structure. Instead, Vico is for the most part content to assume its structure, focusing his energies on its activity in history. As Trabant observes,

> When Vico writes about memory in the New Science he is taking up a conceptual thread that runs consistently through his works, starting with *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*. This is why he keeps his remarks on the New Science comparatively brief: he assumes his readers are familiar with the concept.[265]

In the *New Science*, then, assuming a degree of familiarity on the part of his readers, Vico "ends up explaining [memory] in out-of-the-way corners of the work that are not among the passages usually quoted by Vico exegetes."[266] In spite of the obscurity of these passages,[267] commentators interested in memory universally recognize Vico's insistence

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[262] Ibid., 76.

[263] Ibid., 100.

[264] Ibid., 101.

[265] Trabant, *New Science of Ancient Signs*, 109.

[266] Ibid.

[267] *cf.* Vico, *New Science*, 75, 264, 313.

upon the tripartite structure of memory. Comparing Vico to others within the European tradition of philosophy and, in particular, to Aristotle and Hobbes who each combine memory and imagination under the heading of a single faculty, Trabant explains:

> What is new about the New Science—in terms of both Vico's own philosophy and European philosophy generally—is that it equates memoria-fantasia and ingegno. By doing so, Vico, himself a professor of oratory, alters the traditional system of rhetoric. For by including ingenium within memoria, Vico shifts memoria in the direction of invention.[268]

Or, as Goetsch explains, "In the mentality of the first humans, MEMORIA operated to collect the world together into a human place. The three kinds of memory operated as a whole in the functioning of the imaginative universal as it made the human world."[269] Danesi criticizes Verene for erroneously interpreting the *New Science* as a narrative governed by the imagination, noting that "Vico, in fact, warned the reader in the 1730 edition to guard against the use of *fantasia* unconnected with *ingegno* as well as *memoria*."[270] Yet, Danesi's criticism is ultimately more a function of the inappropriateness of Verene's language than of the inadequacy of his concepts for, in spite of his description of the *New Science* as a 'science of imagination,' Verene is careful to explain that he is concerned with what he terms "recollective *fantasia*," a concept that he means to encompass all three of Vico's "three memories":

> Each term of Vico's "three memories"—*memoria*, *fantasia*, and, *ingegno*—is inseparable from the others. They are a totality. In speaking of fantasia as the form of Vico's science itself, I wish to use "recollection" for this composite sense of memory done on this self-conscious level or, more precisely—recollective fantasia.[271]

The deceptiveness of Verene's terminology aside, he, like other commentators on Vico's conception of memory, picks up on a formula stated explicitly in the *New Science*, which

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[268] Trabant, *New Science of Ancient Signs*, 110.

[269] James Robert Goetsch Jr., *Vico's Axioms: The Geometry of the Human World* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), 40.

[270] Danesi, *Cognitive Science*, 63.

[271] Verene, *Science of Imagination*, 101-102.

itself both recalls and clarifies Vico's position in *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*:

> Memory thus has three different aspects: memory when it remembers things, imagination when it alters or imitated them, and invention when it gives them a new turn or puts them into proper arrangement and relationship. For these reasons the theological poets called Memory the mother of the muses."[272]

In spite of the wide agreement on Vico's conception of memory, there is not yet as standardized way of distinguishing *memoria* as a faculty from *memoria* as a tripartite structure encompassing all three mental faculties. For the sake of clarity, and in order to maintain the integrity of Vico's own terminology, I have chosen to follow Groetsch's approach of using *memoria* for the former, and MEMORIA for the latter.

Vico and the Barbarism of Reason

Apropos of the nature of Reason, then, Vico differs from Bacon in two significant ways. First, as Trabant points out,

> In the final analysis, by systematically reconfiguring the mental faculties, Vico mixes up Bacon's canonical triad of history, poetry, and philosophy, (corresponding to the ascending sequence of *memoria*, *phantasia*, and *ratio*)....By equating memory and imagination, Vico combines history and poetry...to form an entity that he calls philology. But more than anything else, Vico makes it clear that philosophy is built on philology, that MFI [MEMORIA] is the primitive foundation of reason.[273]

Even the most cursory inspection of Vico's conception of human nature reveals that, in contrast to Bacon's account, the faculty of reason is conspicuously absent. More than this, it has been replaced by *ingenium*. Common to both accounts is a three-faculty structure responsible for determining motion, and an insistence upon the centrality and interdependence of memory and imagination. Vico's insistence on including *ingenium* instead of *ratio*, however, has the effect of challenging Bacon's conception of memory and human activity in a fundamental way and, to this extent, Vico's reconfiguration of the soul is consistent with his penchant for Baconian correction and repetition.

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[272] Vico, *New Science*, 313-314.

[273] Trabant, *New Science of Ancient Signs*, 112

Reason is never included as among Vico's list of human faculties. As we have seen, Vico lists, sensation, memory, and intellect,[274] but equates the intellect, not with Reason, but rather with ingenuity. In contrast to ingenuity, the "proper faculty of knowing," and "the creative power through which man is capable of recognizing likenesses and making them himself,"[275] Vico considers Reason (*ratio*) a method that may be of great assistance to ingenuity but which, if inappropriately applied or confused as being, itself, a faculty, may also be parasitic.

> We must not think all antiquity employs only a crippled reason because the ancients did not recognize the operation of the mind which is today counted as a fourth. For method is not the fourth operation of the mind, but rather the art of the third.[276]

Reason, which Vico refers to as geometric, is of use to be sure; yet, it is of use only with respect to particular types of problems. An excellent tool in the purely abstract fields of geometry and mathematics, Reason is *apodictic*: "it show something (*deiknumi*: I show) upon (*apo*) the basis of reasons. It cannot be bound to times, places or personalities."[277] Or, as Goetsch observes, "*Rational* demonstration is unconnected with concrete situations....Demonstration in the purely rational sense, then, is fundamentally sterile."[278] The proper functioning of Reason, argues Vico, can only occur with respect to a closed and stable system of elements such as geometry. To the extent that Reason is reliant upon a pre-existing system of invented elements, however, it is incapable of producing anything new, incapable of discovery, but only of defining and dividing what has already been invented.

It is for this reason that Reason find itself confounded whenever applied to concrete problems:

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[274] Vico, *Most Ancient Wisdom*, 93.

[275] Ibid., 102.

[276] Ibid., *Wisdom*, 99.

[277] Ernesto Grassi, *Vico and Humanism: Essays on Vico, Heidegger, and Rhetoric* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 96.

[278] Goetsch, *Vico's Axioms*, 33.

> Truly, if you were to apply the geometrical method to practical life, "you would no more than spend your labor on going mad rationally," and you would drive a straight furrow through the vicissitudes of life as if whim, rashness, opportunity, and luck did not dominate the human condition.[279]

In the field of public speaking, Vico takes issue with the exclusive use of Reason as "carefully demonstrating nothing but what is obvious, treating the audience like children and putting nothing but pap in their mouths, and to sum up in one word, playing the part of pedant instead of being the speaker at an assembly."[280] More than in the field of oratory, Vico is also, in *Study Methods* suspicious of the application of pure Reason to mechanics:

> Is there no significance to the fact that those scientists who contributed new and spectacular inventions in mechanics after analytic geometry had become a current practice, clearly despised that geometrical method? And that those who strove to invent some machine relying on "analysis" alone met with constant failure?

Reason, then, is for Vico not a faculty of the mind, but rather a method which can be of tremendous use, but as an instrument of *ingenium* not to be confused as being, in itself, a faculty of knowing. Where this happens, says Vico, human beings cannot but help thinking of the world, and of their relation to it, as other than it. To this extent, analysis has a way of dividing up the world, coming to know it in the same way as an autopsy, as a body whose death is the condition of understanding.[281] But, more than this, analysis has a way of alienating human beings from their own natures, as creative agents who make the certain (*certum*) world rather than discovering it in truth (*verum*).

Reason is ultimately parasitic on human nature, dividing it and conquering it. On the one hand, by claiming for Reason the position of a faculty, and by de-legitimizing the function of ingenuity as an arm of the imagination, Bacon divides what is, in Vico's account, unified: MEMORIA. By separating memory and imagination into discrete yet interdependent mental structures, Bacon opens up the possibility of competition among the faculties as opposed to the integrative cooperation that Vico suggests. As we have

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[279] Vico, *Most Ancient Wisdom*, 98-99.

[280] Ibid., 99.

[281] Ibid., 48-49.

seen in the preceding chapter, Bacon finds the imagination disconcerting in so far as its products are inconsistent, a fact that for Bacon reflects an alienation of the imagination from the truth of things. Responsible for making images for reason, the imagination cannot be eliminated; yet, it can, in Bacon's account, be mastered through a weakening of natural memory and its augmentation by a kind of artificial memory structured according to Reason. In mistaking method for faculty, Bacon technologizes the human rational soul/spirit and puts it at odds with itself. By demonstrating the true nature of reason, then, Vico aims at restoring human beings to the experience of themselves *qua* human. Like Bacon, Vico acknowledges the weakening effect of Reason on the natural faculty of memory. In contrast to Bacon, however, Vico insists that this weakening is not agreeable, nor even merely lamentable. Rather, for Vico, the technologizing of human nature through Reason, a condition brought about through education and as a result of an improper order of studies, is unacceptable, and it is his aim, not to replace natural memory, but to restore it. As Vico argues,

> The teacher should give the greatest care to the cultivation of the pupil's memory, which, though not exactly the same as imagination, is almost identical with it. In adolescence, memory outstrips in vigor all other faculties, and should be intensely trained. Youth's natural inclination to the arts in which imagination or memory (or a combination of both) is prevalent (such as painting, poetry, oration, jurisprudence) should by no means be blunted. Nor should advanced philosophical criticism, the common instrument today of all arts and sciences, be an impediment to any of them.[282]

Early training in 'advanced philosophical criticism,' but also logic and geometry, before the natural faculties of MEMORIA have been sufficiently cultivated, renders human beings both impotent and arrogant: impotent because unable to admit anything but unquestionable truths; and arrogant because they assume for themselves access to the *verum*, which, as Vico has argued, is transcendental and so available only to the mind of God:

> Now, such speculative criticism, the main purpose of which is to cleanse its fundamental truths not only of all falsity, but also of the mere suspicion of error, places upon the same plane of falsity not only false thinking, but

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[282] Vico, *Study Methods*, 14.

> also those secondary verities and ideas which are based on probability alone, and commands us to clear our minds of them. Such an approach is distinctly harmful, since training in common sense is essential to the education of adolescents, so that that faculty should be developed as early as possible; else they break into odd or arrogant behaviour when adulthood is reached.[283]

Reason, then, leads to forgetfulness through the weakening of natural memory on the one hand, but also of the fact that the relationship of human beings to knowledge is, as Luft argues, ontological:

> "Knowing" for Vico was an activity of making social customs and institutions in the concrete historical world—what I am calling an ontological process—an activity inseparable from the "knowing" which was, in effect, a hermeneutic understanding by the "knower" that he or she was genetically descended from the original makers of the made and of the truths that this process yielded.[284]

Human beings, then, become arrogant through a process of reification whereby the certainties they create through the faculty of *ingenium* are 'cleansed' by Reason, which attributes to them an impossible verity. More than this, Reason makes human beings arrogant because, in claiming to give them access to divine *verum*, Reason elevates them to the position of transcendent creator, as if the world were contained in them rather than the other way around.

In so far as unrestrained Reason (a danger for Vico just as unrestrained imagination was for Bacon) serves to alienate human beings from their true divine natures, as poets in whom knowing and making coincide, Vico terms it barbaric, and holds it responsible for the repetitive decline of nations back into the brutish state of nature from which they first emerged:

> But as the popular states became corrupt, so also did the philosophies. They descended to scepticism. Learned fools fell to calumniating the truth. Thence arose a false eloquence, ready to uphold either of the opposed sides of a case indifferently....Thus they caused the

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[283] Ibid., 13.

[284] Sandra Rudnick Luft, "Embodying the Eye of Humanism: Giambattista Vico and the Eye of Ingenium," in *Sites of Vision: The Discursive Construction of Sight in the History of Philosophy*, ed. David Michael Levin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 176.

> commonwealths to fall from a perfect liberty into the perfect tyranny or the unchecked liberty of the free peoples, which is the worst of all tyrannies.[285]

The irony of Reason, for Vico, is that in claiming to bring human beings together under the common banner of eternal truth through the elimination of uncertainty, it ultimately leads only to relativism and unrestrained freedom by eliminating the possibility of certainty.

When mistaken for a faculty, and put in the place of *ingenium*, Reason has the effect, not of awakening the divine potential of the human spirit, but rather of deadening the spirit and, paradoxically, compelling human beings toward that brutish state of the soul:

> In this way, through long centuries of barbarism, rust will consume the misbegotten subtleties of malicious wits that have turned them into beasts made more inhuman by the barbarism of reflection than the first men had been made by the barbarism of sense.[286]

Commenting on this passage, Pons observes that Vico's "allusion to the 'barbarism of reflection' takes its entire meaning only with respect to that of the 'barbarism of sense' which is opposed to it, a barbarism different by its origin and its manifestations, and which is especially situated at the other extremity of the path followed by the history of each nation: terminal barbarism against originary barbarism, barbarism of decadence and dissolution against barbarism of the foundation and establishment of principles."[287] Pons is correct in his assessment of the fact that Vico's conception of reflective barbarism is only made intelligible with respect to his barbarism of sense. What he misses, however, is that they are *not* opposed, opposite extremes of human history, but rather identical. Within Vico's *New Science* account of human origins, for example, he describes the way in which humanity *first descended* into the barbarism of sense, as a result of Noah's sons'

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[285] Vico, *New Science*, 423.

[286] Ibid., 424.

[287] Alain Pons, "Vico and the 'Barbarism of Reflection'," trans. Daniel H. Fernald, *New Vico Studies* 16 (1998): 2.

renunciation of the "true religion of their common father Noah."[288] For Vico, humanity's original state was not that of beasts functioning according to the barbarism of sense, but rather in a theocratic community governed by divine providence, and speaking a sacred language "invented by Adam to whom God granted divine onomathesia, the giving of names to things according to the nature of each."[289] At is root, then, the barbarism of sense is, for Vico, the result of a renunciation of Divine authority, and a locating of authority according to the idiosyncratic and immediate desires of individuals. Characterized by a free will conditioned by a tension between the desire for the divine (spirit) and desire for the self (soul), human beings, not recognizing that this tension is the condition of possibility of the will, seek to resolve it by eliminating one of its terms: the divine. In eliminating their desire for the divine, however, human beings also negate the movement of the spirit and, ultimately, their humanity. Reminiscent of the words of Jesus, who said that "whoever wishes to save his life will lose it,"[290] for Vico, the renunciation of divine authority is identical to the renunciation of humanity for, in the absence of a desire for anything but immediate pleasure and utility, there is nothing to distinguish human activity from that of the brute.

When Vico speaks of the 'barbarism of reflection,' then, he is not identifying a second form of barbarism, but rather the mechanism by which humanity's descent into barbarism is effected. By reifying Reason, a method produced by and for *ingenium*, as a faculty essential to processes of human cognition, human beings shift the locus of their activity, from invention to discovery, from humility to arrogance, and from Other to self.

In assuming the ability to discern positive verities through Reason, the true human faculties of memory, imagination, and ingenuity become devalued, as does the knowledge derived from them. Once humans conceive of themselves as capable of true discovery, they, like the sons of Noah, in effect renounce the God of their common father, assuming His authority for themselves. Once Reason achieves full control over the true faculties of the human soul, rendering them effectively impotent, it comes to

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[288] Vico, *New Science*, 112-113.

[289] Ibid., 127.

[290] Matthew 16:25 NAS

discover its sole remaining source of authority in the immediacy of the sense, or brute soul, to which it eventually abandons itself.

Vico's account of reflective barbarism is given within the context of his *New Science* narrative of human origins, and of the cyclical structure of history. If we read Vico's account in light of his account of human nature, an account developed before the *New Science*, and which is assumed by it, what becomes clear is that its novelty comes in certain respects, not from the originality of its concepts, but rather the ways in which it performs the conditions of human agency, as an allegory of the human spirit.

Vico and the Art of Memory Tradition

In light of his insistence upon the cultivation of natural memory, and his suspicion of Reason's inclination toward reorganizing and technologizing the human spirit, it is perhaps not surprising that, unlike Bacon who strongly advocates the use of aids to memory, Vico is for the most part suspicious of artificial memory. In his *Autobiography*, for example, Vico warns against the use of commonplace books, insisting that, far from strengthening recollection, they serve only to decrease one's natural capacity. Describing how he structured his own order of studies, Vico says that his method involved reading each work three times, and according to the following plan:

> The first time to grasp each composition as a whole, the second to note the transitions and the sequences of things, the third in greater detail to collect the fine turns of thought and expression, which he marked into the books themselves instead of copying them into commonplace or phrase books. This practice, he thought, would lead him to make good use of them as his needs recalled them to mind in their contexts.[291]

By reading a work three times, approaching it each time with a greater degree of subtlety, Vico insists that memory will be enhanced in a way that would be impossible through the use of commonplace books. More than this, however, Vico's plan for reading reveals an interest, not only in recollection, but also in imagination and ingenuity. To this extent, Vico describes reading as a practice attuned, not simply to enhancing the capacity of abstracted *memoria*, but to the tripartite structure of MEMORIA that lies at the heart of

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[291] Vico, *Autobiography*, 120.

human nature. Involving a careful analysis of the parts of a work, and a synthesis of their relationships with respect to the whole, Vico's model of right reading is clearly attuned to the hermeneutic circle, but also to the fact that the practice of reading and remembering is ultimately one of making a work for oneself. If we take Vico seriously in his insistence upon the inseparability of *memoria*, *fantasia*, and *ingenium*, then, any practice for the strengthening of memory that does not involve imagination and ingenuity is a memory aid in name only. For Vico, then, *memoria* at the expense of *fantasia* and *ingenium* is not *memoria*, but rather a kind of artificial or false memory, standing in for *memoria* in a way that cannot help but diminish its natural capacity.

The only place where Vico explicitly addresses the issue of artificial memory is in the conclusion to his *Institutiones Oratoriae*, a textbook of rhetoric written for use in his capacity as professor at the University of Naples:

> There is nothing we can say here on memory. It is indeed an innate virtue which is maintained and kept by usage, and if there is an art to this, which I do not think there is, the proper one is that which is called mnemonics.[292]

Here, in Vico's only explicit discussion of the art of memory, we find a clear statement, not merely of distrust, but of suspicion as to its possibility. Memory, for Vico, is not an art that can be learned, but an innate ability. To be sure, like all innate abilities, memory can be trained through exercise, or 'usage,' but this training cannot involve a reliance upon tools and tricks. Instead, the structure of memory necessitates that its use also involve invention. A mind technologized by Reason makes the artificial acceptable for, presuming the possibility of discovery, memory in the service of Reason becomes strictly a means of recording eternal and universal verities. Where its inherent relation to invention is acknowledged, however, memory ceases to be a tool for recording facts discovered and ordered according to Reason, and becomes, instead, an ontological process whereby the facts (*factum*) it recollects are also facts that it makes.

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[292] Giambattista Vico, *The Art of Rhetoric (Institutiones Oratoriae, 1711-1741)*, trans. Giorgio A. Pinton and Arthur Wight Shippee (Atlanta, GA: Rodolpi, 1996), 207.

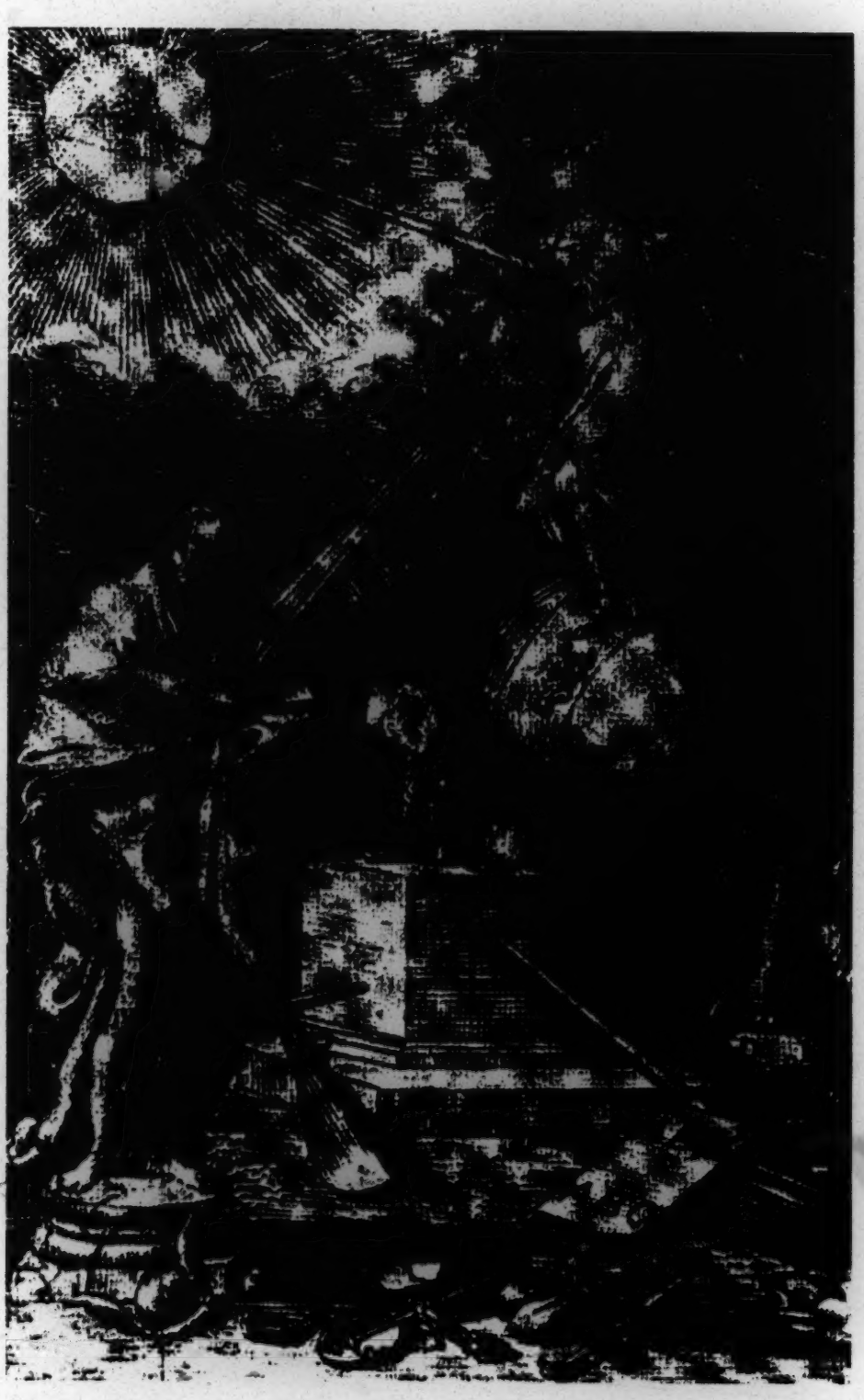

Figure 3. The Frontispiece (*dipintura*) to the 1730 edition of Vico's *New Science*

Figure 4. The Frontispiece (*dipintura*) to the 1744 edition of Vico's *New Science*

CHAPTER 4

READING THE *DIPINTURA* THROUGH BACON'S ART OF MEMORY

In light of his suspicion of Reason in general, and of the art of memory in particular, it is surprising to find Vico introducing his *New Science* with a picture explicitly situated with respect to a Baconian conception of the art of memory:

> As Cebes the Theban made a table of moral institutions, we offer here one of civil institutions. We hope it may serve to give the reader some conception of this work before he reads it, and, with such aid as imagination may afford, to call it back to mind after he has read it.[293]

As should be fairly immediately evident in light of the preceding chapters, Vico's description of his *dipintura* as an aid to pre-conception and recollection is tremendously resonant with Bacon's view of the art of memory. To refresh our memory, Bacon says that

> This art of memory is but built upon two intentions; the one prenotion, the other emblem. Prenotion dischargeth the indefinite seeking of that we would remember, and directeth us to seek in a narrow compass, that is, somewhat that hath congruity with our place of memory. Emblem reduceth conceits intellectual to images sensible, which strike the memory more.[294]

That Vico intended his frontispiece as an aid to memory is seemingly unequivocal, and a fact that has compelled the vast majority of scholars to ignore Vico's other statements on memory and interpret the *dipintura*, and by extension the whole of Vico's thought, in light of an Art of Memory Tradition that Vico otherwise seems to have opposed. Hutton, for example, takes Vico at his word, stating that the frontispiece "present[ed] in pictorial design a mnemonic scheme of the argument he propounds in the body of the work. Employing vivid imagery within an imposing landscape, it sets forth the organization of the study. A stock-in-trade of the rhetorician, the design permits an imaginative

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[293] Vico, *New Science*, 3.

[294] Bacon, " Advancement of Learning, II – VI," 436.

appreciation of the argument that is to follow."[295] Forgetting his overstatement of the beauty and effectiveness of the image, Hutton clearly interprets Vico's words as signifying a mnemonic intention; in the absence of a keen understanding of Vico's conception of memory, however, Hutton uncritically assumes an understanding of memory which he reads into, rather than out of, Vico's *New Science*. Starting from Vico's comments with respect to the frontispiece, and insisting that Vico's *New Science* occupies a critical moment on the art of memory tradition, Hutton continues,

> Vico's *New Science* pointed toward a fundamental reorientation of thought about the uses of memory. Thenceforth memory would be employed as a technique to uncover forgotten origins understood as lost poetic powers....It pointed as well toward the new interest in autobiography, in which the notion of continuous developments from infancy to adulthood would provide a sense of unity that could no longer be discovered in the heavens. As metaphysics yielded to psychology, memory as a key to magic was replaced by memory as a key to soul-searching."[296]

Interpreted in light of what Vico says about the structure of MEMORIA, in terms of statements made even within the *New Science* itself, however, Hutton's interpretation becomes exceedingly problematic. First, as we have seen, for Vico, memory is not a technique for use by understanding, but rather a faculty whose activity *is* understanding. Second, memory is not, for Vico, a method of soul-searching, but rather the result of it. As MEMORIA, memory can only function properly to the extent that one already 'knows themselves,' as Vico makes clear even in his first inaugural oration. Only once one is made aware of the true structure of the mind can human beings overcome the reification of Reason that is responsible for the loss of the soul in the first place. Lastly, Vico's conception of memory is not, as Hutton claims, meant as a way of reorienting the locus of investigation, away from divinity and toward the self, but rather a way of looking outside of the self, toward the importance of God and community in conditioning the possibility of self-hood in the first place. Hutton, then, reads Vico's frontispiece as a starting point for understanding the rest of his thought rather than the other way around and, in so

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[295] Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), 93; *cf.* Hutton, *Art of Memory Reconceived*.

[296] Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, 35.

doing, commits what Vico calls the 'conceit of scholars,'[297] making the foreign familiar by reducing it to the terms of another scholarly discourse or tradition.

Following Tagliacozzo,[298] Rossi,[299] Frankel,[300] and Verene,[301] and resonating strongly with Kunze[302] and Dieckmann,[303] Hutton's position on the meaning of the frontispiece, his misreading and insistence upon locating it within the art of memory tradition, is for the most part representative of writing on the subject. In perhaps the most extreme example of this tendency, Colilli[304] suggests that, a work in the tradition of the art of memory, Vico's frontispiece and accompanying commentary represent an attempt to prevent any attempt on the part of the reader to participate in the making of the image's meaning, a binding of the reader's faculty of *fantasia* in an effort to carefully control their relation to the text:

> The 'Idea of the Work' in Vico's *New Science* is a critical interpretation of what the hieroglyphs in the frontispiece signify. It is not solely a description, it also explains the meaning of the objects from within a philosophical/philological framework. Vico limits the meaning of each hieroglyph by explaining how they relate directly to what is contained in the *New Science*.[305]

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[297] Vico, *New Science*, 61.

[298] Giorgio Tagliacozzo, "Epilogue," in *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*, eds. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden White (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969).

[299] Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory*; *cf* Paolo Rossi, "Schede Vichiane," *La Rassegna Della Litteratura Italiana* 62, no. 3 (1958): 375-383.

[300] Frankel, "the 'Dipintura'."

[301] Verene, *Science of Imagination*, 98, 188, 190; "Vico's frontispiece and the Tablet of Cebes."

[302] Donald Kunze, "Giambattista Vico as a Philosopher of Place: Comments on the Recent Article by Mills." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 8, no. 2 (1983): 237-248.

[303] Liselotte Dieckmann, "Giambattista Vico's Use of Renaissance Hieroglyphics," *Forum Italicum* 2, no. 4 (1968): 382-385.

[304] Colilli, "Giordano Bruno's Mnemonics."

[305] Ibid., 358.

Extreme and offensive as it may be to Vichians who praise the Vichian imagination and poetic sensibility, if we insist upon thinking of Vico within the art of memory tradition (something that not even Yates was wont to do), Colilli's assessment is, in a sense, the only reasonable one. If a work in the art of memory, the frontispiece is a technology with the aim of establishing in the mind of the reader the categories for making the *New Science* intelligible, and also of aiding with recollection in terms of those categories. As a technology, the frontispiece would aid the memory by doing its work, by giving images and relationships to the reader that they would otherwise have to make themselves.

Forgetting, for a moment, this tension within Vico's own statements, there are two reasons directly pertaining to the frontispiece that we should be wary of approaching it in this way, as a work of artificial memory. First, if the *dipintura* is, in fact, intended by Vico as a tool to assist the memory, it is a tool that doesn't work. Danto, for example, points out that the meaning of Vico's image is not self-evident, but rather reliant upon its accompanying commentary and so, to this extent, is all but superfluous:

> This much is clear: If Vico had not explained, symbol by symbol, what each thing meant, there would be no way of inferring to the tremendous original vision that is *The New Science*.
>
> The arcane graphic density of Vico's engraving goes no distance whatsoever in transforming it into a work of art equivalent in artistic value to the philosophical value of the text that animates it. But the complex interpretive functions that map verbal texts onto pictures generally leave the artistic merit of the latter unaffected, even if the texts themselves are works of undoubted genius.[306]

Or, as Trabant admits,

> It [the frontispiece] has never quite worked for me. I have read the *New Science* several times and flatter myself that I have grasped and retained the idea of the work. And though I must have seen the picture a hundred times, I simply cannot remember it very well....my memory of this visual allegory of the *New Science* appears to me to be significantly less vigorous, to use Vico's term, than what the text has to say. Above all, the allegory confuses me more than it assists me in recalling the main idea of the *New Science*.[307]

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[306] Danto, "Art," 465.

[307] Trabant, *New Science of Ancient Signs*, 114.

The fact that Vico's frontispiece ultimately fails as a work of artificial memory, as it does for Danto and Trabant, is not for lack of trying or ability on the part of the reader. Rather, it is because Vico's design simply refuses to follow the rules of artificial memory established through a long tradition, and rearticulated by Francis Bacon. In order for a work in the art of memory to be effective, says Bacon, its images must be ordered, striking, and clear. The hieroglyphs in Vico's frontispiece, however, satisfy none of these criteria.

Although Vico is careful to explain the significance of (almost) every hieroglyph and emblem in the frontispiece, their order is in no way self-evident, nor even immediately discernible in light of Vico's commentary. On the one hand, Vico claims to present his reader with a set of three ordered spaces, according to which his hieroglyphs are organized:

> To state the idea of the work in the briefest summary, the entire engraving represents the three worlds in the order in which the human minds of the gentiles have been raise from earth to heaven. All the hieroglyphs visible on the ground denote the world of nations to which men applied themselves before anything else. The globe in the middle represents the world of nature which the physicists later observed. The hieroglyphs above signify the world of minds and of God which the metaphysicians finally contemplated.[308]

In the respect that Vico describes, the frontispiece does, in fact, present its readers with a set of three spaces, put in order according to the order of things to which human minds applied themselves, which is also to say the order in which human beings made the world for themselves. Beginning by making social institutions, says Vico, human beings moved to the contemplation of nature and, finally, to the contemplation of themselves. Unfortunately, however, this is the extent to which Vico's image is ordered and so, beyond this very simple structure, ceases to be helpful as a memory aid.

In the space representing civil institutions, for example, the space in which the greatest proportion of hieroglyphs is represented, Vico, himself, admits that his frontispiece is characterized by certain degree of disorder:

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[308] Vico, *New Science*, 26.

> Lastly, in the plane most illuminated of all, because the hieroglyphs there displayed represent the most familiar human institutions, the ingenious artist exhibits in capricious arrangement the Roman fasces, a sword and a purse learning against the fasces, a balance and the caduceus of Mercury.[309]

The artist, Franscesco Sesone, may have been ingenious, but, engraved at Vico's own direction, its capricious arrangement is sufficient to render the 'plane most illuminated' among the darkest for recollection. Ordered capriciously, without a logic as to how each object relates to the others, the reader is left without a sense of relationship that would assist them in anticipating one object from another. This problem is further exacerbated by the fact that the Vico's jumble of hieroglyphs includes one not described in his commentary. Immediately beneath the statue of Homer (or leaning up against it in the 1730 version of the frontispiece) is a winged cap which Vico suggests elsewhere[310] was meant to signify, in 1730 himself and his discovery of the true Homer, and in 1744 the reader after Vico's insistence that they narrate and make the *New Science* for themselves.[311] Not including a discussion of this hieroglyph in his commentary, however, Vico's inclusion of the winged cap serves only to confound the reader who is left with neither an idea as to its significance, nor a conception of how its is related to the other objects with which its shares the space.

Vico's second space, the globe representing the world of nature, is nearly empty, girded only by the belt of the zodiac and displaying only the signs of Leo and Virgo.[312] Presumably, Vico includes Leo and Virgo—representing Hercules' clearing of the Nemean forest, and the cultivation and harvesting of fields respectively—to indicate that the chronicling of human history, or "time-reckoning," coincided with the human realization that they could become master's over nature rather than being merely subject to it. Ignoring, for a moment, the fact that the signs are so unclear as to make them

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[309] Ibid., 15.

[310] This is a claim made by Verene in the absence of any kind of citation that would aid the reader in verification. Verene, *Knowledge of Things Human and Divine*, 151.

[311] Vico, *New Science*, 104.

[312] Ibid., 4.

indiscernible were it not for Vico's commentary, we see here, on the globe, an order of images that follows the order of the signs of the zodiac, with Virgo following Leo; yet, with only two images, the space of the globe is so simple that such an order, although not unhelpful, is also not necessary.

Vico's final space, or the metaphysical realm, is, like the globe, populated by only two images, God and metaphysic, which are ordered by a connecting line signifying the light of providence. The problem with this space, however, is that the order established by the light of providence also extends it into the realm of civil institutions, moving from God, to lady metaphysic, to the sculpture of Homer. More than this, however, Vico describes the light of providence as "illuminating a convex jewel which adorns the breast of metaphysic" and "thus reflecting and scattering the ray abroad to show that metaphysic should know God's providence in public moral institutions or civil customs, by which the nations come into being and maintain themselves."[313] Vico's scattered ray, then, serves to negate, or rather transcend, his claim to representing distinct ordered spaces, for each of the spaces are produced, 'illuminated,' only with respect to the light of providence that occupies the space of minds, while also being the condition of possibility of the delineation of space(s) in the first place.

Vico's *dipintura*, then, is in violation of the art of memory criterion of order. But it is also characterized by a tremendous lack of clarity. First, the objects to which Vico refers in his commentary are quite often difficult to identify. On the one hand, this is a result of deficiencies in the original woodcut engraving such that certain items, like the signs of the zodiac, are more blob-like than anything else. A further difficulty in identification comes as a result of a lack of coincidence between the commentary and the image. As we have seen, a description of the winged cap is conspicuously absent from Vico's account, but Vico's commentary also includes details that are absent from the *dipintura*. Discussing the image of the cinerary urn, for example, Vico says that "the urn is inscribed *D. M.*, which means 'to the good souls of the dead.'"[314] The original 1730 design, designed by Domenico Antonio Vaccaro and engraved by Antonio Baldi, indeed

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[313] Ibid., 5.

[314] Ibid., 9.

included an inscribed urn to the right of the alter. In the 1744 version, however, the inscription is absent, thus creating doubt in the mind of the reader as to the correctness of his identification, but also eliminating a kind of distinctiveness that would aid in the reception of the image into memory.

Reproductive difficulties aside, Vico also deliberately designs the *dipintura* in such a way as to make certain images obscure. For example, just as Vico describes it, the lituus is placed on the alter; yet, obscured by a fire, a water jar, and a lit torch, it is difficult to see, and could quite easily be missed if not for Vico's description. Another, perhaps more striking, example is that of the plough which Vico deliberately obscures:

> The plough shows only the point of the share and hides the mouldboard. Before the use of iron was known, the share had to be made of a curved piece of very hard wood, capable of breaking and turning the earth. The Latin's called the mouldboard *urbs*, whence the ancient *urbum*, curved. The mouldboard is hidden to signify that the first cities, which were all founded on cultivated fields, arose as a result of families being for a long time quite withdrawn and hidden among the sacred terrors of the religious forests.[315]

Here, Vico does something very strange relative to the art of memory tradition, signifying a concept by appeal to an image that is, for all intents and purposes, absent. Obscured, Vico's plough in no way resembles that which it is intended to signify. Rather, Vico's commentary must do the work of, in a sense, constituting an absent object as if it were present in order for it to signify a concept that is present in Vico's *New Science*. Relative to the art of memory tradition, such a move, of using absence as a heuristic, is non-sensical and ineffective, as, in fact, it is to the reader who earnestly attempts to use Vico's image as a memory aid.

Vico's *dipintura*, then, is neither well-ordered nor striking and clear and so, relative to the art of memory tradition, represents a failed attempt on Vico's part to produce an effective heuristic device. This recognition of Vico's inconsistency with himself puts us in the position of having to assess him in one of three ways. First, if Vico is, as the bulk of the literature would suggest, deliberately situating himself within the art of memory tradition, then the ineffectiveness and sloppy design of his frontispiece would

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[315] Ibid., 11.

lead us to judge him as either ignorant or incompetent. This is unlikely for, as we have said above, Vico's decision to work in the area of the art of memory would represent a dramatic and sudden shift in his opinion of the tradition, but would also be inconsistent with claims he has made both in the *New Science*, and in his earlier works. More than this, however, as a professor of rhetoric at the University of Naples, Vico was certainly more than familiar with the works of Cicero, as well as the *Ad Herenium*, and Quintilian's *Institutio oratio*, the three works that Yates has described as providing the foundation for the art of memory tradition.[316] We have also established Vico's familiarity with the works of Francis Bacon and, in particular, Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, the work in which he most clearly outlines the basic principles governing the art of memory. Lastly, Vico's acquaintance with the works of Giulio Camillo[317] and Ramon Llull,[318] two figures identified by Yates as central to the occult art of memory tradition, is well established. Clearly not ignorant of the tradition, we might be tempted to call Vico incompetent; yet, in light of the demonstrated subtlety of his insights elsewhere, it is perhaps best to give him more credit than this.

Second, we might be tempted to accuse Vico of lying about his intention for the frontispiece for, if he is lying, it certainly would not be the first time. In his *Autobiography*, for example, Vico opens by lying about the date of his own birth, claiming to be born in 1670 rather than 1668. Although Fisch attributes this error and others to a kind of Freudian substitution,[319] what is more likely is that Vico manipulated facts in order to put them in the service of a greater intention. This is the suggestion of Luft, who minimizes the significance of Vico's 'errors' by suggesting his *Autobiography* be read, not as a true account, but rather as a fable narrating the path to true education.[320] What Luft's account suggests, then, is that Vico is a liar, but one who does so rhetorically in order to guide and to teach.

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[316] Yates, *Art of Memory*, 2.

[317] *cf.* Colilli, "Giordano Bruno's Mnemonics," 355 (footnote 32)

[318] Vico, Most Ancient Wisdom, 100.

[319] Fisch, "Introduction," footnote 133.

[320] Luft, "Embodying the Eye of Humanism," 184.

A similar instance of lying is found in *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, in which Vico attributes the concept of the metaphysical point to Zeno in a way that would seem to confuse two different Zenos. As Palmer explains,

> There has been a common agreement among scholars that Vico makes the mistake, so common in his time, of confusing Zeno the Eleatic (fl. 464 B.C.), founder of the dialectic, and Zeno the Stoic (d. 264 B.C.), founder of the Stoic school. Vico combines Eleatic principles with stoic elements and creats [sic] a pseudo-Zeno, who becomes the forerunner of his own metaphysics, and who explained the origin of multiplicity from the One by the hypothesis of indivisible metaphysical points.[321]

The traditional scholarly line for Vico's production of a Zeno that never existed is that he was simply mistaken; yet, as Palmer continues, Vico later admits to have made his Zeno up: "The whole discussion actually is minimized, because as Vico later confesses, the only true authority for the metaphysical points is Vico himself."[322]

Vico, then, has given us ample reason to believe that he is lying about his intention for the frontispiece, perhaps to lure the reader in order to achieve some other rhetorical intention. While plausible, we must be careful not to consider Vico a 'boy who cried wolf,' lest we use his penchant for rhetorical lies as an interpretive crutch whenever we encounter a difficult passage. Rather than risk missing some aspect of Vico's work, it is perhaps best to follow Vico's advice who suggests that scholars treat each other in the spirit of mutual good faith:[323]

> Therefore, first know and do not judge anyone without a hearing. Who, with knowledge like that of a fair and honest judge, would not balance whatever crime it may be necessary to charge one with by his other deeds done diligently within the law under different circumstances, and then not forgive him?

The best tactic in approaching a text, and especially one whose author has demonstrated such subtlety, intentionality and originality as Vico, is that used by Craig in his approach

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[321] L. M. Palmer, "Introduction," in *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, ed. L. M. Palmer, (Ithaca: Cornell university Press, 1988), 69 (footnote 3).

[322] Ibid.

[323] Vico, "Oration III," 79.

to reading Plato, reading nothing as flippant or accidental, but rather every word and comma as if placed with great diligence and so pregnant with meaning:

> To the extent that one cannot explain everything in and about a dialogue, one had best admit that one's interpretation is inadequate, and one's understanding of it incomplete. That is, one has not perfectly recaptured the author's understanding of it, *his* interpretation, which is the only correct standard of correct interpretation, elusive though this invariably turns out to be in practice.[324]

Innocent until proven guilty, truth until proven false, where we discover inconsistencies like this one is Vico's work, we should assume, as a methodological principle, that the flaw is in our own understanding rather than in the work itself.

Vico's *Dipintura* and the Art of Memory

How, then, are we to reconcile Vico's tacit claim to have designed his frontispiece according to a Baconian art of memory, with what can only be a simultaneous refusal to do so. On the one hand, Vico's use of intertextuality would suggest a Baconian reading of the *dipintura*. On the other hand, however, Vico seems to refuse to satisfy his stated intention. What we need to ask in light of this tension is not *whether* Vico's frontispiece is Baconian, but rather *in what ways* is it Baconian? Giving Vico the benefit of the doubt, and assuming that tension between word and action is intended, and so reconcilable in the light of correct understanding, we can only assume that the two are not as opposed as they first appear, but rather that Vico's intended meaning for the *dipintura* lies in this space of tension. Bearing this in mind, a close inspection of the *dipintura* reveals that, in contrast to the confused jumble of hieroglyphs, there are three images that stand apart as particularly memorable, and which are ordered, clear, and striking: (1) the seeing eye, (2) Metaphysic, (3) and the statue of Homer. What I would like to argue, therefore, is that Vico uses Bacon, not as a key to understanding his image as a whole, but rather as a cue for distinguishing between what is, in fact, a set of two images superimposed. Reading Vico's image against the criteria of Bacon's art of memory, as in fact his use of deliberate intertextuality would seem to suggest, yields a distinction within

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[324] Leon Harold Craig, *The War Lover: A Study of Plato's Republic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), xxxiv.

the image between the certain products of human invention, represented by the disorganized mess of largely indistinguishable hieroglyphs, and the true ontological structures that condition the possibility of the certain, represented by a clearly ordered and delineated relationship between three easily striking and easily recognizable emblems. Vico's use of Bacon, then, does not fit with his art of memory as is so commonly thought, but rather with a demonstrated strategy of subtle criticism. Using Bacon's art of memory as a way of leading the reader to an understanding of the structure of MEMORIA, Vico, then, uses Bacon as a means to his own overcoming.

As we have discussed, save for three images, Vico's *dipintura* may be considered a failure in the art of memory tradition in general, and with respect to that of Bacon in particular. Connected by the light of providence, only the seeing eye, metaphysic, and the statue of Homer satisfy Bacon's requirement that images be ordered, clear, and striking. Noting that the *dipintura* may be understood as a complex matrix of symbols, divided along the lines of a series of binary cuts (Pagan vs Christian-Hebraic; technical vs mysterious; animistic vs mechanical; natural vs artificial; and intellective vs emotive), Fletcher argues that the image can be divided at the most basic level along the lines we have just described:

> On the most general plane, it may be helpful to observe one singularly graphic binary cut. By far the largest number of emblems would seem to refer, one way or another, to Vico's theory of *corsi* and *ricorsi*, that is, to the "poetic" development of civilization. Examples would be the fasces, the alter, the plough. Let us call them Type A.
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> Set off against these ironically separated elements there is a second, superordinate group of connected units: (a) God's triune Eye; (b) the winged figure of Metaphysic; and (c) the figure of Homer. Although these are abstractly and statuesquely presented, these three emblematic figures (Type B) do not directly refer to the whole course of human development. Rather, they refer to Vico's theory and method for understanding that "whole course."[325]

In a way that resonates most strongly with our account here, Fletcher summarizes with the suggestion that "If one had to epitomize Types A and B, one might say that all the elements of Type A are understood to lie within the domain of *things seen,* whereas the

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[325] Angus Fletcher, "On the Syncretic Allegory of the *New Science*," *New Vico Studies* 4 (1986): 33.

triad of Type B lies within the domain of *powers of seeing*."[326] In his account of this fairly obvious distinction within the dipintura, however, Fletcher fails to account for several things which would otherwise add depth to his account. First, Fletcher divides the images in the *dipintura*, or rather justifies his division, by appeal to what this division would presumably signify. In so doing, Fletcher puts the cart before the horse, so to speak, or rather is guilty of begging the question. Fletcher's, account is therefore incomplete because it fails to deal with Vico's own claim to have designed the *dipintura* as an art of memory. In light of Vico's problematic claims apropos of memory, it would seem that Fletcher would prefer to ignore rather than reconcile. Second, in failing to locate Vico's *dipintura* with respect to the art of memory tradition, testing the picture against Vico's own claims as to its intention, Fletcher fails to recognize its significance *for* memory. Suggesting Type B emblems as concerned with the "power of seeing," Fletcher is unable to see that this power is, in fact, the power of MEMORIA, a concept far richer in meaning and subtlety, and which shifts the focus of the image away from the 'things seen' as things to be discovered in a Baconian sense, and toward the thing that imparts onto things their 'thingness' in the act of seeing, as an act of making. Lastly, then, in excluding memory from his account, Fletcher is blinded from the recognition that Vico uses Bacon's art of memory to attune his readers to a division in the *dipintura* between the *certum* and the *verum*, between images signifying the *certain* objects created by human MEMORIA, and that *true*, and so transcendental, structure of human nature that makes the certain world possible.

Beginning with Vico's cue that we read the *dipintura* with respect to Bacon's art of memory, we find that the *dipintura* is designed in such a way as to privilege Type B images, which are ordered and clear, over Type A images, which are disordered and obscure. The memorable quality of Type B images is further enhanced, however, by their emblematic character as against the hieroglyphic nature of Type A, a fact apparent from Vico's description of the latter as hieroglyphs while referring to the former by name alone. As an example,

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[326] Ibid., 34.

> These antiquities are the deep shadows which the picture shows in the background, against which there stand forth, in the light of the ray of divine providence reflected by metaphysic upon Homer, all the hieroglyphs which represent the principles, known now only by the effects, of this world of nations.[327]

Although often considered identically, hieroglyphs and emblems in fact occupy very different traditions, and carry with them very different significances.

Hieroglyphics became a source of tremendous interest in the Renaissance when, in 1419, a book was discovered which purported to explain the otherwise hidden significance of Egyptian hieroglyphs. Claiming to have been written in Egyptian by Horapollo, and translated into Greek by "Philippos," the book suggested that hieroglyphs were an ancient form of communication by ideogram, or pictures that bore some kind of natural relation to the thing signified. As Vicari explains,

> [Horapollo] supposed that they [hieroglyphs] were always ideograms, (i.e., that a picture or hieroglyph of a falcon referred to the concept of *falcon*, or its symbolic meaning, *eternity*). A picture of a goose meant *son*, because a goose is believed to love its offspring more than any other animal does. The vulture meant *mother*, because male vultures were thought not to exist. The ears of the ox signified *hearing*, and a hare, more mysteriously, signified *what is open*.[328]

Although Horappollo has since been proven wrong in his account of the function of Egyptian hieroglyphs,[329] the ideographic perspective was dominant up until the 1800's, and formed the foundation for renaissance mnemonic strategies, like those of Della Porta, who suggests the power of hieroglyphs as memory images:

> For this we turn to the method of the Egyptians who, because they had no letters with which to represent the concepts in their souls, and so they could more easily retain the useful speculations of philosophy, began to write with pictures, using the images of quadrupeds, birds, fishes, stones, plants, etc. instead of letters. This can be applied to our purposes, since

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[327] Vico, *New Science*, 7.

[328] Patricia Vicari, "Renaissance Emblematica," *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 8, no. 3 (1993): 157.

[329] Peter M. Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem: Structural Parallels between the Emblem and Literature in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), pp. 15ff.

> we also want to use images instead of letters in order to depict them in the memory.[330]

This interest in the natural language of the Egyptians also excited Bacon, who insisted on the function of hieroglyphs, as well as gestures, as *ex congruo*. As Singer explains, hieroglyphs are for Bacon, "natural as the throwing up of the hands is a natural sign of exasperation or a grimace is a natural sign of pain. There is no question of their being natural in the way that the Ademic language, through its essential link between word and thing, was thought to express the nature of things."[331]

On the one hand, then, the appeal of hieroglyphs laid in their ability to communicate in terms of figures whose natural, or ideographic, relationship to the things they signify would make them immediately and universally identifiable. On the other hand, however, Horapollo's influence also inaugurated a second mystical tradition which extended the idea of ideographic representation in such a way as to suppose that "everything in nature has significance because of an affinity of its qualities with those of the thing signified."[332] Conceived in this way, the world became a book consisting of symbols through which the divine mind of God meant to communicate. Under the influence of the mystic writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, the idea of the 'book of nature' led many Renaissance authors to understand the world by picturing it, using images to represent the images of nature and so come to a kind of total understanding of the nature of reality as a whole:

> Many renaissance authors combined the art of memory and images with the even higher ambition of constructing a "mirror of the world," a web of relationships and forms reflecting the structure of reality....A belief in the unity of the universe which is reflected in a fundamental unity of knowledge leads to the hope that man can acquire that total learning and understanding of reality by means of images which explore the ideal relationships between objects and their symbols.[333]

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[330] Qtd. in Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory*, 77; *cf.* footnote 38, p. 278.

[331] Thomas C. Singer, "Hieroglyphs, Real Characters, and the Idea of Natural Language in English Seventeenth-Century Thought." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50, no. 1 (1989): 54.

[332] Vicari, "Renaissance Emblematica," 157

[333] Frankel, "The 'Dipintura'," 45.

Where the world of things is emptied of its being and, instead, conceived as a world of signifiers, the epistemological problem of corresponding words with things becomes moot, as the task of the thinker is transformed from one of representation to one of mirroring what is already only representation. The task of the thinker is, then, transformed from determining the nature of things, which is self-evident and available to all (a cat is a cat), to determining the esoteric or hidden *meanings* of things. Thus, as Mario Praz explains, "Emblems originate...as a humanistic attempt to give a modern equivalent of the hieroglyphs as they were wrongly interpreted."[334]

The emblematic tradition of the 16th and 17th centuries, then, consisted in the production of images, modeled after those found in the world of nature, along with written interpretations necessary to make their hidden meanings intelligible. "A didactic genre, intended reveal religious and moral truths,"[335] emblems consisted of three parts, the *pictura*, the image; the *inscription*, or motto inscribed as part of the picture; and the *subscription*, or epigram placed below the picture.[336] As Hill explains, the original mystic and didactic qualities that made emblems and impreses (consisting of only a *pictura* and *inscriptio*) so interesting among academic circles, soon made them a hot commodity among European aristocracy:

> Its nature was individual and esoteric, its appeal individual and aristocratic. Worn on clothing, displayed on banners of the nobility, and printed in collections of books, the imprese was a metaphor representing the maker or wearer and what he wished to undertake (*imprendere*). Because it was a personal symbol, the pictorial part, or body, had to be justly proportioned to the motto, or soul. Its message was veiled, its wit gallantry, and its purpose that of a fashionable game.[337]

Curious and esoteric, emblems began to find their way into scientific books as a way of both compelling and introducing the reader to the body of a work . According to Tomasi,

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[334] Mario Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery*. 2nd ed. (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1964), 23.

[335] Elizabeth K. Hill, "What Is an Emblem." *The journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 29, no. 2 (1970): 261

[336] Vicari, 156.

[337] Hill, "What is an Emblem," 262.

"In contrast to the analytic taxonomy of the table of contents they became, through their artfully arranged imagery and their adroit use of the word in its epigraphic tradition, not only introduction and prologue, but also synthesis and commentary on the ideas expounded in the book"[338] Referring metaphorically to the central aspects of a written work, however, the use of emblems to preface a treatise generally also carried with them the tacit hermetic claim to represent the nature of things in themselves, as a 'mirror of reality' made possible by divine inspiration:

> An emblematic image, therefore, is indirectly a visual metaphor by way of an allusion to a literary source, or perhaps we might say a metaphor for a text which is itself already figural—metaphoric of metonymic. It is a metalepsis—a metaphor for a metaphor.[339]

Even when used as frontispieces to scientific treaties, then, emblems continued to function hermetically, as representations of a representation of ultimate reality. From their origins in a mystic understanding of Horapollo (which, itself, represents a misunderstanding), then, emblems were conceived in neo-platonic terms, as a picture, or "body" which, inferior in worth, was nonetheless capable of directing its viewer toward an understanding of the true forms of things.

Distinguished from hieroglyphs by their mystic and Platonist roots, emblems are also distinguished aesthetically for, in contrast to the starkness of hieroglyphs, emblems tended to be highly ornate, a feature motivated not only by the mnemonic demand for striking images, but also, as Praz notes, by the renaissance love for ornament and lavish decoration: "The weak spot of Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was display, display in sumptuous ceremonies, theatrical performances, opera, ballet, witty devices in which the chivalrous past became atrophied, elegant emblems into which the precepts of the classical authors, philosophers and love poets, were distilled and

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[338] T. L. Tomasi, "Image, Symbol and Word on the Title Pages and Frontis-Pieces of Scientific Books from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century." *Word and Image* 4 (1988): 372.

[339] Vicari, "Renaissance Emblematica," 164-165.

crystallized."[340] More than highly ornamental, emblems also followed in the earlier European tradition of personification:

> Personification—the process of endowing inanimate objects or abstract notions with human attributes—flourished in European art and literature from the thirteenth to the late eighteenth century. The Baroque mind filled the universe with life, giving human attributes to vices, virtues, the arts, the faculties of the soul, and allegorical representation to beasts, flowers, jewels, and the seasons of the year.[341]

The use of personification, a strategy popularized in the emblem books of Cesare Ripa, were well suited to the art of memory. Discussing the *Oratoriae artis epitome* of Iacobo Publicio (1482), Rossi explains that, as spiritual, abstract concepts could not be easily conveyed through corporeal similitudes (as in the case of hieroglyphs). Within the emblematic tradition, therefore, "Images have the task of fixing ideas, words and concepts in the mind through a striking gesture or a cruel face, or the visible appearances of stupor, sadness or severity."[342] Personification, then, was a strategy used by Renaissance emblematists to represent spiritual concepts, or platonic forms, which transcended nature but which, nonetheless, served as its guiding principles. In contrast to hieroglyphs, which functioned strictly as a means of communication through resemblance, and whose appearance tended to be likewise pragmatic, emblems functioned more as didactic tools, meant to excite the reader through mystery and ornament, and communicate transcendental truths through striking personifications.

Returning to Vico's frontispiece, it becomes apparent that the line between Type A and Type B images is marked by his differing use of hieroglyphs and emblems. On the one hand, Vico's use of hieroglyphs is in line with Bacon's, as objects bearing a kind of natural relationship to the things represented, signifying the elements that Vico identifies as crucial to his ideal eternal history. For example, looking to the hieroglyphs displayed on the grounds, we find a Roman fasces representing the emergence of earthly authority

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[340] Praz, Studies in Seventeenth Century Imagery, 172.

[341] Londa Schiebinger, "Feminine Icons: The Face of Early Modern Science," *Critical Inquiry* 14, no. 4 (1988): 664.

[342] Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory*, 27.

in the familial father;[343] a sword representing that heroic law was established and maintained through force;[344] a purse representing the late emergence of commerce carried on by means of money;[345] a balance representing the rise of democratic forms of government;[346] and the caduceus of Mercury representing the overcoming of war through the use of messengers to mediate the disagreements between warring nations.[347] Vico, then, uses hieroglyphs to signify civil *things*, the artifacts produced by human beings living in community.

In contrast, Vico mobilizes the emblematic tradition in his Type B images, using striking personifications to represent the transcendental principles and relationships that condition the possibility of civil life. First, representing God, the seeing eye is a fairly conventional Christian image with origins in the middle-ages. An eye, within a triangle, within a radiant circle, Cooper explains that the image is meant to illustrate the omnipresence/omnipotence (eye) and infinite sanctity (circle) of the Trinitarian Godhead (triangle).[348] Indeed, in Vico's account of divine providence, we find no reason to think that he differs in any significant way from this original significance:

> In contemplation of this infinite and eternal providence our Science finds certain proofs by which it is confirmed and demonstrated. Since divine providence has omnipotence as minister, it must unfold its institutions by means as easy as the natural customs of men. Since it has infinite wisdom as counsellor, whatever it disposes must, in its entirety, be institutive order. Since it has for its end its own immeasurable goodness, whatever it institutes must be directs to a good always superior to that which men have proposed to themselves.[349]

All seeing and all-knowing, however, the significance of this figure with respect to Vico's account of the *verum* is that God is also all-making, a belief that Vico makes

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[343] Vico, *New Science*, 15.

[344] Ibid., 17.

[345] Ibid., 18.

[346] Ibid., 18-19.

[347] Ibid., 19-20.

[348] Jean C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 62.

[349] Vico, *New Science*, 102.

abundantly clear in *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*. The convertibility of the *verum* and *factum*, of the true and the made, would suggest an interpretation, therefore, of Vico's image of the seeing eye as God in the capacity of first maker: the transcendental Other who, himself at rest, brings existence into being, through the power of motion, which is *conatus*.

As we have seen from Vico's metaphysics, motion is a necessary condition of existence, and so must originate from outside of it from a transcendental point of rest and stability: God. As such, the light of providence that emanates from God's omniscient eye may be conceived in terms of motion, as the ongoing creative activity necessary to set and maintain things in motion. As Vico makes clear in *Most ancient Wisdom*, extended things do not subsist in themselves, but only through a motion that is, in a sense, not their own, but rather God's: "God knows all things because in Himself He contains the elements with which he puts all things together"[350]

Providence, then, is tantamount to the divine power of conatus, what Vico describes as occupying a space in between rest and motion, creative potential and created object.[351] To this extent, Vico agrees with Bacon that God's presence is evident in the world of nature. Looking only to nature, however, Vico argues that scientists have limited themselves to the investigation of providence in only one aspect of its motion, mistaking a part for the whole. "Until now," observes Vico,

> the philosophers, contemplating divine providence only through the natural order, have shown only a part of it. Accordingly men will offer worship, sacrifices and other divine honors to God as to his Mind which is free and absolute sovereign over nature, because by His eternal counsel He has given us existence and through nature preserves it to us.[352]

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[350] Vico, *Most Ancient Wisdom*, 48.

[351] Luft has marvelously explored the genetic implications of Vico's conception of divine providence, but in a way that fails to fully account for how its intelligibility relies on Vico's earlier work on the relationship between rest, *conatus*, and motion. (Sandra Rudnick Luft, "A Genetic Interpretation of Divine Providence in Vico's "New Science"," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 20 (1982): 151-169)

[352] Vico, *New Science*, 3.

What philosophers have yet to contemplate, says Vico, is the aspect of providence "which is most proper to men, whose nature has this principal property: that of being social."[353]

That Vico connects the seeing eye of God to the figure of Metaphysic via the light of providence is, therefore, significant in two respects, signifying two types of *conatus* and pertaining to the two essential structures that make up human nature. On the one hand, providence is at work and evident in the brute soul, or *anima*, which is the material and extended reality that human beings share with the rest of the natural world. In the absence of this providence of the soul, human beings would not, properly speaking, exist. On the other hand, providence is at work with respect to the distinctly human spirit, or *animus*, which functions through its desire after the divine, and becomes manifest in the creativity of the mind.

More than merely by implication, the duality that characterizes Metaphysic is also represented pictorially by its ambiguous position with respect to the world of the mind and the natural world. Partaking of both natural and divine, human nature is neither one nor the other, but rather in a space of tension, caught, as it were, between worlds in a repetitive cycle between the desire for God and the desire for the immediacy of sense:

> In providing for this property [of being social] God has so ordained and disposed human institutions that men, having fallen from complete justice by original sin, and while intending almost always to do something quite the contrary—so that for private utility they would live alone like wild beasts—have been led by this same utility and along the aforesaid different and contrary paths to live like men in justice and thus to observe their social nature.[354]

Caught between then immediacy of sense and the divinity of mind, human beings come into being as human through a sense of alienation. On the one hand, human beings are in the world, created by God and so not coincident with Him, unable to arrive at knowledge of its truth (*verum*). On the other hand, human beings are characterized by a divine mind that longs to know God, but which can only do so through a consideration of the nature from which their divine nature has separated them. Unable to grasp the world in truth,

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[353] Ibid.

[354] Ibid., 4.

"Man then turns this fault of his mind to good use"[355] and creates a world for himself. Caught between two worlds, then, Metaphysic exercises its desire, mediating and directing the motion of providence, to create a civil and historical world of its own.

Vico's representation of Metaphysic is clearly emblematic, which would suggest a reading of his figure in light, not only of Vico's commentary and *New Science* as a whole, but also the emblematic tradition to which it would seem to refer. As is the case with many aspects of Vico's philosophy, however, the relative youth of Vico studies has meant that a paradigmatic interpretation has yet to be established.[356] Verene, for example, insists that the winged temples are meant to serve a cue, guiding the reader to identify Metaphysic with the Greek messenger god Mercury:

> Metaphysic is in a position analogous to Mercury in that, like Mercury as messenger of Zeus or Jove, she brings the message of the divine....Vico's new art of metaphysics, like Mercury the bringer of the new agrarian law, allows for metaphysics to re-found intellectual order in a new way. Since forms of thought are interlocked with forms of social order for Vico, the winged cap of Mercury suggests that Mercury can actually visit in the heroic age of a nation as a social force, but in the modern age of humans Mercury can visit only as a form of metaphysic—the divine can appear only as a form of oratory and literature. Yet metaphysics, like Mercury, is a messenger of the divine wisdom in the civil order.[357]

Verene's mercurial interpretation is not unfounded, for I suspect that Metaphysic's position, between divine and human, as well as the wings on her head are meant to produce just such an initial reaction. Careful attention to the other images present in the *dipintura*, as well as to Vico's own comments on the nature and appearance of Mercury, however, lead the reader, once again, to an esoteric understanding of Vico's image. In this sense, the superficial resemblance to Mercury serves as a lure, again, an

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[355] Vico, *Most Ancient Wisdom*, 50.

[356] Andrea Battistini, "Contemporary Trends in Vichian Studies," in *Vico: Past and Present*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981), 20-21.

[357] Verene, *Knowledge of things human and divine*, 152, *cf.* Donald Phillip Verene, "Vico's "*Ignota Latebat*"," *New Vico Studies* 5 (1987): 77-98; and "Tablet of Cebes."

invitation to read closely and understand the *dipintura* in a way that ultimately confounds what would otherwise appear quite obvious.

Although clearly not an unproductive avenue of interpretation, there are several indicators that Vico would seem to discourage a mercurial interpretation of Metaphysic. Aside from the fact that Metaphysic is never referred to in mercurial terms, she is also pictured in such a way as to put distance between her and objects typically associated with Mercury. For example, Metaphysic is *not* pictured wearing a winged helmet, but rather as having 'winged temples.' This distinction is of crucial importance, especially in light of the fact that Vico pictures Mercury's helmet *as well*. Even if it is not described, Vico places the winged helmet of Mercury at the base of the statue of Homer. More than this, Metaphysic is also separated from the winged caduceus, yet another traditional symbol of Mercury, which is represented hieroglyphically on the ground in and amongst the other civil objects. The significance of this separation of Metaphysic from mercurial objects is two fold. First, as has been explained, it is indicative of a lack of identity between the two figures. Second, however, to the extent that Mercury's helmet and caduceus lay on the ground, they are estranged from him as well. Within the *dipintura*, then, it would appear that Mercury, messenger between gods and men, is not only absent, but rather deposed by Metaphysic who, rather than taking upon herself his powers of divine mediation, reveals the true nature of Mercury's work, not as divine, but rather consisting in concrete social institutions. As Vico explains in the *New Science*, Mercury does not represent a kind of transcendental power of divine mediation, but was rather an imaginative universal invented during the heroic age and representing the movement of agrarian law from the first fathers into the *famuli*, who accepted it in exchange for protection:

> There are two wings at the top of the rod (signifying the eminent domain of the [heroic] orders, and the cap worn by Mercury is also winged (to confirm their high and free sovereign constitution, as the cap remained a hieroglyph of [lordly] liberty). In addition, Mercury has wings on his heels (signifying that ownership of the fields resided in the reigning senates). He is otherwise naked (because the ownership he carried to the *famuli* was stripped of all civil solemnity and based entirely on the honor

> of the heroes) just as we have seen Venus and the Graces depicted as naked.[358]

As should be evident from the passage above, Vico's image of Metaphysic bears absolutely no similarity to Mercury as Vico, himself, describes him. Female, clothed, wing-templed, and bearing none of the objects typically associated with Mercury, Metaphysic is pictured in such a way as to occupy the space of Mercury, and reveal his activity, not as transcendental mediation, but rather as the product of human activity.

Vico's positioning of Metaphysic *in the place of* Mercury may be read as yet another effort on Vico's part to distinguish himself from Bacon. In her delightful and erudite essay on gender politics in representations of science, Schiebinger explains that "stretching back to Boethius' sixth-century portrayal of Philosophy as a woman, [this tradition] was codified and explained in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologica*, the Renaissance bible of iconography."[359] Representing most abstract virtues (i.e. reason, peace, liberty, the rational soul, truth, wisdom, invention, imagination, history, metaphysics, etc.), Ripa suggested that the gender of his emblems merely suited the gendered structure of the French language.[360] Admitting that this correlation holds true for the most part, Schiebinger argues that the "most fruitful context for understanding the feminine icon is Christian Neoplatonism."[361] For Renaissance Neoplatonists, all creative action was conceived on the model of procreation, as the result of a union between masculine and feminine principles. Knowledge, then, was conceived not in terms of discovery, but rather as a pro-*creative* act that required active initiation on the part of the male scientist in conjunction with certain feminine principles that would guide his activity:

> *Scientia*, then, is feminine in early modern culture because it is feminine in the language, but also because the scientists—the framers of this scheme—are male: the feminine *Scientia* plays opposite the male scientist. In order to unite in a creative union with the female, the male scientist images his science as his opposite, or feminine. But more than that, the

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[358] Vico, *New Science*, 223.

[359] Schiebinger, "Feminine Icons," 663-664.

[360] Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985), 65.

[361] Schiebinger, "Feminine Icons," 673

> scientist imagines that a feminine science leads him to the secrets of nature or the rational soul.[362]

In contrast to the feminine conception of science in the Renaissance, however, Schiebinger argues that the Enlightenment brought with it a conceptual shift that, quite literally, changed the fact of science. As she notes, "The feminine icon had a masculine rival. From its inception, Baconian science was intended to be "masculine" science."[363] In contrast to the procreative conception of knowledge that typified the Renaissance, Bacon, as well as his colleagues at the Royal Society of London, called for a distinctly masculine philosophy. "Rejecting a passive, speculative, and effeminate philosophy, Bacon called for an active philosophy, one which would act as a formative principle upon a feminine nature."[364] Rather than consider knowledge as procreative, then, Bacon initiated a tradition that would see the scientist acting on nature, not in order to produce knowledge, but rather as a means of discovery through the elimination of mediating principles. As such, the English scientific tradition saw a decline of feminine iconography and, instead, a preference for depicting actual scientists over personifications of abstract principles.

Mercury is in many ways an apt representation of Bacon's model of scientific knowledge. As male messenger god, the use of Mercury within the context of Vico's frontispiece would suggest a view of knowledge as strictly communicative, a process of penetrating nature in order to discover its truths. Furthermore, as male, the figure of Mercury no longer installs a sense of difference that would see knowledge as a result of relationship. Rather, of like-gender to the male scientist, Mercury allows for a kind of shared identity that ultimately eliminates Mercury as a mediating character. Just as women scientists consistently identified themselves with the muses,[365] so too could male scientists identify themselves with Mercury, with the resulting presumption of being in direct contact with the light of eternal truth.

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[362] Ibid., 675.

[363] Ibid., 677.

[364] Ibid., 678.

[365] Ibid., 676.

Vico's use of a feminine figure to represent Metaphysic, then, serves to contradict the masculinity of Baconian science through a return to the Renaissance procreative conception of knowledge production, a return marked by the intentional mobilizing of images taken from Ripa himself. Rossi, for example, argues that the figure Vico uses to represent Metaphysic is derived from a combination of Ripa's images for Metaphysics and Mathematics.[366] Agreeing with Rossi's view that Metaphysic be considered a derivation from Ripa's *Iconologica*, Frankel disagrees with the nature of his derivation citing, instead, a strong resemblance between Vico's Metaphysic and Ripa's Contemplative Life.[367] Rather than construct Metaphysic as a complex made up of various other emblems, Frankel defers to the law of parsimony, finding in Ripa's *Iconologica* a description of Contemplative Life that fits Metaphysic in almost every way, as "A woman with the face turned towards heaven, with great humility, and with a ray of splendor which, descending, illuminates her; she keeps the right hand high and extended, the left low and closed, and has two small wings on her head."[368]

Accepting Frankel's account on the basis of its simplicity, we see in Vico's *dipintura* not only a reaction against the Baconian effort to masculinize knowledge, and a return to neo-platonic conceptions of knowledge production, but also an insistence upon a conception of knowledge production as dynamic. In contrast to the Baconian will to discovery, which relies on a correspondence theory of knowledge, and whose aim is, therefore, a catalogue of stable and unchanging truths, the implication of Vico's identification of Metaphysic with Contemplative Life is that knowledge is dynamic, ever-changing, and that the aim of the scientist should, therefore, be of maintaining himself in right-relation to the first mover of both the soul and the spirit. As Vico concludes his *New Science*, "from all that we have set forth in this work, it is to be finally concluded that this Science carries inseparably with it the study of piety, and that he who is not pious cannot be truly wise."[369]

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[366] Rossi, "Schede Vichiane," 377.

[367] Frankel, "The 'Dipintura'," 46

[368] Qtd. in Frankel, "The 'Dipintura," 46.

[369] Vico, *New Science*, 426.

Having installed the platonic figure of the Contemplative Life in the place of Mercury, and, more than this, having deposed Mercury from the position of a transcendental possibility of true knowledge to one of social artifact, Vico also alters Metaphysic's relation to the light of providence. Metaphysic, in Vico's account, is not strictly an ecstatic vessel capable of reflecting the *verum* into the plane of its social relationships, but rather a creative force in its own right, determining God's providential motion through the freedom of its will:

> The ray of the divine providence illuminating a convex jewel which adorns the breast of metaphysic denotes the clean and pure heart which metaphysic must have, not dirty or befouled with pride of spirit or vileness of bodily pleasures, by the first of which Zeno was led to put fate, and by the second Epicurus to put chance, in the place of divine providence. Furthermore it indicates that the knowledge of God does not have its end in metaphysic taking private illumination from intellectual institutions and thence regulating merely her own moral institutions, as hitherto the philosophers have done. For this would be signified by a flat jewel, whereas the jewel is convex, thus reflecting and scattering the ray abroad, to show that metaphysic should know God's providence in public moral institutions or civil customs, by which the nations have come into being and maintain themselves in the world.[370]

Reflected off the convex jewel of Metaphysic, divine providence, the power of divine creativity, is evident in the civil world as determined by human free activity. Thus, although providential, the light emanating from Metaphysic is not genetic in the same way as that from God. Where God's providence is manifest in the natural world through the creation of extended things, it is manifest in the social world through its direction by human agents who create certain things on the model of the divine. As such, the light of providence that connects Metaphysic to the statue of Homer is meant to signify a distinctly human kind of genesis. Consistent with this interpretation, Luft identifies three creative processes that Vico's *New Science* identifies as divine: of God, of the poets, and of the philosopher-historians. Upon closer analysis, however, Luft ultimately reduces the number of Vico's creative, and so providential, processes to two:

> Idealist or neo-Platonic interpretations of the creative activity of the philosopher-historian emphasize its relation to God's creativity: a form of

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[370] Ibid., 5.

> participation in or emanation of it. However, by presenting the philosopher-historian as creator of the poetic characters of the other two creators, providence and the theological poets, Vico intended, I believe, that the divine creativity of the philosophers be understood genetically as a development of poetic creativity.[371]

Vico's emblem, therefore, represents the work of providence in two respects. On the one hand, it pictures that of God in the aspect of his *conatus*, which is the power of motion. On the other hand, it pictures that of human beings in their freedom to direct divine motion in the construction of certain civil things.

The last emblem, or Type B image, pictured in Vico's frontispiece is the statue of Homer who, as "the first gentile author who has come down to us,"[372] represents human history, not as immediately experienced, but rather as produced in language and remembered as an artifact of a community. The base of the statue is cracked, says Vico, to signify the discovery of the true Homer,[373] which is to say that Homer, just as the history attributed to him, is a human construction that, until Vico, had been reified and ossified as if true. In his discovery that Homer was, in a sense, totemic, standing in for the tradition of a community in order to justify and give meaning to its existence with respect to a fabulous past—a past that, in a sense, never happened—Vico restores human agency to itself, as producer of its history rather than being merely subject to it.

As artifact, then, we also see in Homer the creative functioning of Metaphysic, not merely as mediating between soul and spirit, but more specifically in its triune structure as MEMORIA. First, as history, Homer stands in for the memory (*memoria*) of a nation, or of the nations in general. In this sense, Vico here resonates with Bacon's insistence that learning be divided according to the faculties of the human soul, and that history be the manifestation modeled after the faculty of *memoria*. Yet, in contrast, to Bacon, Vico also makes Homer stand in for poetry, arguing that he was "unrivaled in creating poetic characters, the greatest of which are so discordant with this civil human

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[371] Luft, "Genetic Interpretation," 160.

[372] Vico, *New Science*, 5.

[373] Ibid.

nature of ours, yet perfectly decorous in relation to the punctilious heroic nature,"[374] but also that he, himself, was a poetic character, as indicated by the fact that he is represented as a statue rather than a 'real' person. After a lengthy analysis of the life and wisdom attributed to Homer, Vico concludes that "the great many difficulties on the one hand, taken together with the surviving poems in the other, seem to force us to take the middle ground that Homer was an idea or a heroic character of Grecian men insofar as they told their histories in song."[375] Representing Homer as, at once historical and poetic, Vico mixes up the categories of human learning that Bacon argues so fervently to keep separate, and so illustrates his claim that memory is the same as imagination. More than this, however, Homer is represented as the embodiment of ingenuity and *not* philosophy for, as Vico explains, "The complete absence of philosophy which we have shown in Homer, and our discoveries concerning his fatherland and his age, arouse in us a strong suspicion that he may perhaps have been quite simply a man of the people."[376] In fact, argues Vico, Homer's ingenuity is marked by the fact that the rise of abstract philosophical inquiry brought an end to the creation of true poetry, a poetry that reflected the unified nature of the human mind unabstracted under the knife of Reason:

> How is it that Homer, who preceded philosophy and the poetic and critical arts, was yet the most sublime of all the sublime poets, and that after the invention of philosophies and of the arts of poetry and criticism there was no poet who could come within a long distance of competing with him?[377]

Just as, for Bacon, the possibility of a division of learning is evidence of a basic division of the soul, so Vico insists that knowledge is never divided, but rather always characterized simultaneously by memory, imagination, and invention, and so demonstrative of a basic tri-unity at the heart of the human mind. Homer, then, signify's a pure work of the human spirit, undefiled by the pride introduced by Reason.

To summarize, then, Vico's *dipintura* is constructed in such a way as to use the principles of the art of memory as a way of cuing the reader to a significant and

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[374] Ibid., 303.

[375] Ibid., 323.

[376] Ibid., 308.

[377] Ibid., 309.

intentional division between emblems and hieroglyphs. On the one hand, he uses hieroglyphs to represent certain important elements of his ideal eternal history; yet, as obscure and unordered, Vico's hieroglyphs ultimately fail as an aid to memory. On the other hand, however, Vico uses emblems to illustrate the transcendental or ontological structures that condition the possibility of human action. Introducing nothing new into his account, Vico uses the *dipintura* as an esoteric means to diagram what he had elsewhere explained apropos of the structure of human nature. Reliant upon God's providence, or *conatus*, for their motion, human beings exercise their free will through the determination of divine providence, creating for themselves a certain (*certum*) historical world which they can know, and so navigate, as if it were true (*verum*). This human will-to-determination is necessarily exercised, not through abstract Reason, but through the tripartite relationship of MEMORIA. And it is here, in the understanding of his emblematic diagram of human nature, that we discover Vico's reason for making his hieroglyphs and, by extension his account of ideal eternal history, so unmemorable. The products of his own faculties of MEMORIA, the events he describes are neither natural nor necessary, but rather creative works of Vico's own genius. What Vico's *dipintura* represents, then, is not an effort to control human memory as Bacon would suggest, but rather an art of memory in a broader sense, as MEMORIA, intended to awaken the reader's own divine creativity so that they might make the *New Science* for themselves:

> Indeed, we make it bold to affirm that he who meditates this Science narrates to himself this ideal eternal history so far as he makes it for himself by that proof "it had, has, and will have to be." For the first indubitable principle posited above is that this world of nations has certainly been made by men, and its guise must therefore be found within the modifications of our own human mind.[378]

The *Dipintura* as an Art of MEMORIA

In selecting an approach to reading Vico's *dipintura* both with an awareness of its apparent tensions, and adopting intentionality as a methodological principle, our discussion find itself coming around full circle. As was first suggested in our

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[378] Ibid., 104.

introduction, Vico's comments apropos of his intention for the *frontispiece* bare a striking resemblance to comments made by Francis Bacon in his *On the Advancement of Learning*. As a starting point for the rest of our discussion, it would perhaps be helpful to once again look at the relevant passages side-by-side:

> As Cebes the Theban made a table of moral institutions, we offer here one of civil institutions. We hope it may serve to give the reader some conception of this work before he reads it, and, with such aid as imagination may afford, to call it back to mind after he has read it.[379]

> This art of memory is but built upon two intentions; the one prenotion, the other emblem. Prenotion dischargeth the indefinite seeking of that we would remember, and directeth us to seek in a narrow compass, that is, somewhat that hath congruity with our place of memory. Emblem reduceth conceits intellectual to images sensible, which strike the memory more.[380]

In comparing these passages by Vico and Bacon respectively, what becomes clear, on the surface at least, is an identical interest in the production of images as a way of establishing the categories of interpretation through which the reader is expected to both interpret and recollect the content of a work.

A suspicion of intertextuality here is supported, perhaps, by the *imprese* of the title page of the 1744 edition of the *New Science*, which borrows several of the main figures of the *dipintura*, but in different positions. The title image features lady metaphysic reclined on the globe which is beside rather than balanced atop the alter as it is in the *dipintura*. Gazing into a mirror, and wielding a geometrician's triangle, Metaphysic sits static, like Narcissus, captivated by her own image.[381] What is significant for our purposes are the words inscribed on the alter, "*IGNOTA LATEBAT*," words that appear on the *imprese*, but which are absent from the *dipintura*. Translated as "She

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[379] Ibid., 3.

[380] Bacon, "Advancement of Learning. Books II – VI," 436.

[381] Verene has convincingly argued that the *imprese* and the *dipintura* are related as 'before and after' pictures of metaphysics, representing the illumination that comes as a result of shifting one's gaze away from the self and toward the activity of providence. (Verene, *Knowledge of Things Human and Divine*, 145-157; *cf.* Verene, "Vico's "*Ignota Latebat.*")

[Metaphysic], unknown, lying hidden,"[382] Papini remarks that, in so far as emblems and hieroglyphs serve to make concepts sensible, to make the unknown unhidden, the motto is Baconian in style.[383] In light of this additional Baconian trace, it would seem that much more plausible to infer a direct intertextual relationship between Vico's frontispiece and Bacon's art of memory. Such a connection, however, is only intelligible to the extent that we are able to demonstrate, not only that Vico was familiar with Bacon, but also the nature of his relationship.

The similarity between their accounts of the art of memory not being sufficient to justify an intertextual reading of Vico's frontispiece, however, the first chapter endeavored to establish a relationship between Vico and Bacon that would explain their resonance as more than merely coincidental. More than merely identifying Bacon as influential—as one of the four authors that would be "ever before him in meditation,"[384]—Vico seems to have structured his philosophical career as a kind of critical repetition of Bacon's major works. Adhering to a belief in the value of Bacon's project of developing a new logic of the sciences in accordance with the identifiable limits of human certainty, yet also aware of certain faulty assumptions that lie at the root of his thinking, Vico's project is largely one of Baconian fulfillment through a process of correction and repetition. Vico's relationship to Bacon is significant in two respects. First, it serves to make plausible the claim that the similarities between Vico and Bacon apropos of the frontispiece are more than coincidental, and so justifies a reading of the frontispiece in light of Bacon's art of memory in particular rather than in terms of some vaguely defined tradition, a propensity demonstrated in a great deal of writing on the subject. Second, however, an understanding of the critical nature of Vico's relationship to Bacon calls into question the extent to which their two accounts are entirely resonant, and is suggestive of a more critical reading of the frontispiece, in terms of its *dissonance* with Bacon.

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[382] Verene, "*Ignota Latebat,*" 83.

[383] Mario Papini, *Il Geroglifico Della Storia: Significto E Funzione Della Dipintura Nella 'Scienza Nuova' Di G. B. Vico* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1984), 76.

[384] Vico, *Autobiography*, 139.

Taking the *imprese* motto seriously, that "She, unknown, was lying hidden," one should be wary of overly simple interpretations of Vico. Instead, one should read Vico at his word, so to speak, testing him against himself in such a way as to reveal both consistencies and inconsistencies and, where one finds the latter, to interpret them, not as mistakes, but as invitations to enter the hidden or esoteric aspects of his thought. In his tacit appeals to Bacon, then, Vico invites the 'masters of wisdom'[385] to first and foremost read carefully, taking him at his word, but in the recognition that his words are not unequivocal, but may conceal just as easily as they reveal. In the place of dissonance between Vico's claim to conform to the guidelines and intentions of a Baconian art of memory, and his failure in the production of an effective image, then, is an opportunity to read deeper, to descend into the mind of Vico just as Vico descended into the minds of primitive humanity.

The 'master key' for an understanding of the *dipintura* is the concept of *memoria*, one that, as we have seen, is a point of tremendous disagreement between Vico and Bacon. A reading of Vico's *dipintura* as a work in art of memory is possible only if we consider Vico's concept of *memoria* in a way identical to Bacon's, as a faculty concerned solely with recollection, and whose structure is determined from outside itself, through the cooperation of, or competition between, imagination and reason. Conceived in this way, the art of memory serves as an aid to recollection by bypassing the faculty of imagination and installing a set of rational images imposed from outside. The art of memory, in the Baconian sense, therefore functions through the coercive power of Reason to artificially structure the human mind from without. If, however, Vico's description of the frontispiece is read in light of his theory of memory as MEMORIA, as a structure of the mind under which the otherwise separate faculties of memory, imagination, and ingenuity become one in the same, then his intention takes on an entirely new meaning. Understood in this light, Vico's frontispiece becomes, not an aid to Reason in the structuring of recollection, but rather an aid to MEMORIA as a process of invention. With this in mind, Vico might be best translated as follows:

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[385] Vico, "Practic of the New Science," 428.

> As Cebes the Theban made one of the moral, we similarly offer to vision a table of civil things; which may serve the reader for conceiving [*concepire*] the idea of this work before he has read it; and in order to reduce it more easily to MEMORIA [*memoria*], with similar help from the imagination [*fantasia*], after it has been read.[386]

This translation, from the original 1744 edition of the *New Science*, brings to the fore the presence of three terms, absent from the Bergin and Fisch translation, that take on tremendous significance in light of the present understanding of Vico's view of MEMORIA. Of immediate interest is, of course, Vico's explicit use of the term *memoria* which, as we have seen, Vico uses both to signify recollection (the sense communicated by Bergin and Fisch), and the triunity of *memoria*, *fantasia*, and *ingenium*. Reading *memoria* as signifying the latter, Vico's frontispiece takes on an entirely new significance from what has been previously thought. Instead of a work developed as an aid to recollection, the *dipintura* becomes a work intended as an aid to the creative powers of MEMORIA. This reading is confirmed by the position that Vico gives to *fantasia*, as a faculty whose role it is , not to merely help in the reduction of the image to memory, but rather as a equal partner ("with similar help") with the *dipintura* in a process of preconception. In light of this reading, Vico's focus, then, is shifted away from promoting the passive acceptance of ready-established categories of interpretation, and toward the practice of *ingenium*, or of finding the middle term between the imagination of the reader, and the manifest imagination of Vico in the *dipintura*. Vico's explicit use of the terms *memoria* and *fantasia*, in addition to his tacit insistence upon a kind of ingenious relationship between reader and author, is suggestive of the fact that, even from the beginning of his work, Vico is assuming a conception of memory identical to that which he had previously established in *Most Ancient Wisdom*, but in a way that would also lend itself readily to "the indefinite nature of the human mind," in so far as

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[386] My translation. [QUALE *Cebete Tebano* fece della *Morali*, tale noi qui diamo a vedere una *Tavola della cose Civili*; la quale serva al *Leggitore* , per concepire l'IDEA DI QUEST'OPERA avanti di leggerla; e per ridurla più facilmente a memoria con tal'aiuto, che gli somministri la fantasia dopo di averla letta.] Giambattista Vico, *Principj Di Una Scienza Nuova Intorno Alla Natura Delle Nazioni, Per La Quale Si Ritruovano I Principj Di Altro Sistema Del Diritto Naturale Delle Genti* (Napoli: 2 tom., 1744), 1.

"whenever it is lost in ignorance man makes himself the measure of all things."[387] By writing in an ambiguous way, and in the knowledge that the reader is likely to prefer a significance in light of Francis Bacon, as an aid to the abstracted faculty of recollection, Vico performs his axiom. In an interesting way, then, Vico uses Bacon in order to critique him, agreeing with him about the human proclivity to reduce the foreign to the familiar, while at the same time creating an image and a commentary whose preferred, or exoteric, meaning is sure to be in line with Bacon.

This leads us to the third significant term in Vico's description, *concepire*. Now, the Bergin and Fisch translation reads "We hope it [the *dipintura*] may serve to give the reader some conception of this work before he reads it."[388] This translation is problematic in two respects. First, in translating *concepire* as conception, Bergin and Fisch transform it from a verb into a noun. More than this, however, Bergin and Fisch also alter the locus of activity, away from the reader who, in Vico's translation, conceived the idea of the work before it is read, and toward the *dipintura* which 'serves to give the reader some conception.' In transforming *concepire* into a noun, and in changing the locus of activity, therefore, Bergin and Fisch play into the art of memory tradition by rendering the reader a passive vessel for the reception of images. Translating Vico's words in this way, Bergin and Fisch not only play into exoteric trap of familiarity set by Vico, but also produce a text in which Vico's original and crucial ambiguity is lost. Only in returning to Vico's original words, and in reading him in the light that he, himself, provides—in terms of the 'master key' that is his notion of MEMORIA—can we descend beyond the obstacle of our own will to familiarity.

This leads us to the second problem with Bergin and Fisch's translation of the term *concepire*. A verb meaning 'to conceive,' Vico uses *concepire* not only to signify a process of forming or receiving conceptions, but also to connote a creative activity not dissimilar from 'giving birth.' Read in this way, Vico's intention for the *dipintura* becomes that it "may serve the reader for *giving birth to* the idea of this work before he has read it." In this sense, Vico seems to be inviting the reader to participate in the

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[387] Vico, *New Science*, 60.

[388] Ibid., 3.

writing of the *New Science*, paradoxically bringing it about in advance of reading it, and through the process of narrating it to themselves. As Vico explains in an apostrophe to the reader,

> For the first indubitable principle posited above is that this world of nations has certainly been made by men, and its guise must therefore be found within the modifications of the human mind. And history cannot be more certain than when he who creates the things also narrates them.[389]

In light of Vico's insistence that human knowledge is limited to the products of its own activity, or the certain, Vico's use of the verb *concepire* would seem to imply that his *New Science* whose conceptions the reader should strive to passively receive, but rather an opportunity to make it anew through the faculties of MEMORIA. On the other hand, however, if we acknowledge that the 'idea' of Vico's *New Science* does not pertain to the particularities of his account (which are inventions of Vico's, and opportunities for the exercise of creative agency on the part of the reader), but rather to the basic ontological structures and processes that lie at the heart of the production of certain history, to the workings of MEMORIA, then we can read Vico as promoting the birth, not of particular ideas, but rather of the imagination of the reader. As we have seen, Vico's entire career is marked by a concern for the pernicious character of Reason in contributing to humanity's alienation from its divine creativity. Vico is also a teacher, with a passion for correcting the violence against the imagination committed as a result of an improper order of studies. As such, Vico assumes a reader whose natural and imaginative dispositions have already been diminished to the point of non-existence, a reader whose divinity has been repressed by an education and a social life that would see it structured according to Reason; yet, for Vico, hope for the reader is never lost. The reader can, indeed, give birth to MEMORIA as it should have been in youth. In contrast to the safety of Reason, however, which digests unfamiliarity by either exclusion or reduction, embracing one's MEMORIA is not a process achieved without courage:

> But if there is someone, as becomes a courageous man, who will persist on the road he has entered, and under the unwise pressure of his parents having learned nothing methodically and all against his natural disposition, now at a difficult age when he may have a family as well as

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[389] Ibid., 104.

> public responsibilities, he must learn the same things by himself. In this process so many and so formidable difficulties stand in his way that most men would be left with nothing more than a bitter longing for a sounder education.[390]

Read in light of his concept of MEMORIA, then, Vico's intention for the *dipintura* is not, as a superficial or reductionist reading would have it, as an aid to recollection, but rather as an aid to MEMORIA. As we shall see in the final section of this essay, Vico's design for the *dipintura* is, therefore, didactic, serving as a kind of midwife meant to encourage the birth of MEMORIA which methods of modern education and the barbarism of reflection represented by Bacon have served to otherwise retard.

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[390] Giambattista Vico, "Oration IV: On the Proper Order of Studies," in *On Humanistic Education (Six Inaugural Orations, 1699-1707)*, ed. Donald Phillip Verene (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 126.

EPILOGUE

VICO'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE DISCIPLINE OF SOCIOLOGY

Contributing to the ongoing debate with respect to Vico's significance to the history of thought in general, and to social theory in particular, I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the significance of the preceding for contemporary sociological practice. This being a comparative work looking at the affinities and contrasts between Vico and Bacon, it is my hope to have contributed to a richer understanding of the ways in which Vico's critical sense of admiration has played out in his work, to have illustrated the subtlety with which Vico has designed even seemingly superfluous elements of his text, and so to have opened up the possibility of further investigation into the significance of the apparently trivial in Vico's writing. I also hope that I have contributed to the debate concerning how Vico should be read. Adopting what has been termed the "law of logographic necessity," I have sought to demonstrate the brilliance of Vico's writing, as deliberate and coercive as Verdicchio has so astutely recognized,[391] but also, paradoxically, in such a way as to ultimately lead the reader to an understanding of their own creative potential as *producer* of the text. Aware of the authority of the text, Vico, in his genius, nonetheless refuses to fight it, but rather uses it as a means to its own overcoming. An appreciation of this, however, is only possible to the extent that we allow ourselves to be compelled by the logic of each of Vico's texts, but particularly that of the *New Science*, engaging it on its own terms and, following Vico's advice, "as if there were no books in the world."[392]

A difficulty that plagues analyses such as this, however, is that they run the risk of shallow pedantry,[393] of participating in relatively insignificant internal debates without any self-evident concern for broader civil or moral implications, a criticism that Vico, himself, repeatedly launched against the intellectual establishment of his day. In a

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[391] Massimo Verdicchio, "The Rhetoric of Epistemology in Vico's "New Science"," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 19 (1986): 178-193.

[392] Vico, *New Science*, 96.

[393] My many thanks to Dawn Alexandrea Berry for this phrase.

Vichian move, then, I would like to close this work by identifying three related aspects of Vico's work that are of particular pertinence to contemporary social theory. First, demanding that "doctrines must take their beginning from that of the matters of which they treat,"[394] Vico challenges the Enlightenment attitude of beginning and ending inquiry *in media res* by, not only establishing a place for metaphysical reflection, but also insisting on its priority. Perhaps the greatest challenge of the kind of instrumental Rationality championed by Francis Bacon is that, failing to heed the words of the Oracle at Delphi, it refuses human beings the possibility of self-knowledge. Parasitic upon human nature, Reason transforms the subject into an ecstatic, an empty vessel through which it can operate, and so alienates the self both from itself and from the social world of which is it, itself, co-creator.

Now, the alienating effects of Enlightenment rationality are well-documented, and it was an interest in addressing these effects that, stemming from the writing of the so-called sociological fathers (Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim), was largely responsible for the emergence of the discipline of sociology in the first place. Although still plagued in many ways by the positivist will to conduct social scientific research on the model of the natural sciences, Mills' scathing 1959 critique[395] had the effect of re-orienting the discipline of sociology to adopt a more 'imaginative' approach, motivated not by the positivist desire to predict and control, but rather by the ways in which 'private troubles' are informed by broader institutional and ideological 'public issues.'[396] While crucial, Vico would suggest that even these efforts to address human alienation are incomplete, and haunted by the specter of the Enlightenment. In the area of social policy, for example, Vico would not in any way disagree with the power and use of survey research and statistical analysis as appropriate methods; where he would disagree, however, is in the privileging of empirical facts derived using these methods over the

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[394] Vico, New Science, 92.

[395] C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

[396] "Social science deals with problems of biography, of history, and of their intersections within social structures." (Mills, *Sociological Imagination*, 143). For more on the distinction between private troubles and public issues, see especially page 226.

nature, or ontological structure, of those very human beings under investigation. Although the issue of which comes first, the individual subject or the social conditions into which they are born, can be a bit of a chicken-and-egg question, Vico attunes us to the fact that our existence as potentiality necessarily precedes our essence as realized social beings. For Vico, the limits of human being-in-the-world is structured prior to the contracting of that being, which is to say that human beings are not thrust into the world as an unlimited potentialities, but rather as potentialities that may be exercised either for or against their own natures. Whether we agree with Vico's account or not, any investigation into social problems that fails to reflect upon their relation to the ultimate structure of the social beings that are at their root, cannot help but begin and end 'in the middle of things.' In so doing, social research is condemned to eternally beginning anew, treating symptoms as they arise without as awareness either of their cause or of whether or not they are problems at all. Putting our faith in the efficacy of Reason at the expense of the wisdom of the past, and by refusing to stake a claim to the nature of human nature, the practice of sociology cannot help but flounder in a perpetual lack of understanding. Like Sisyphus, a sociology from which metaphysical reflection is excluded is condemned to a state of eternal and meaningless repetition, contributing to the barbarism of reflection rather than standing apart from it. Content with description or, worse yet, with the construction of social theories and policies in a way that begins and ends with the views and opinions of a population alienated from itself, sociology may be accused of doing little more than fiddling while Rome burns.

The second lesson that can be learned from Vico, then, is that, humbly acknowledging its relationship to knowledge, social science should avoid the temptation to speak for truth, and, instead, embrace a more didactic role. Now, this is not to say that social scientists should be concerned with delivering the particularities of their knowledge, like priests whose authority is derived from a kind of privileged relationship to truth. Just like Vico, we should continue to investigate and seek to understand the particularities of social life; yet, like Vico, we should also be keenly aware that our knowledge is never true, but only certain. To this extent, social scientific knowledge should be used to address particular social problems, but also to educate, or lead (from the Latin *ducare*), others to an understanding not dissimilar from the Lutheran doctrine of

the priesthood of all believers. Social scientists are not oracles, but rather wise men and women whose self-understanding puts them in a position to cultivate that same understanding in others. As Vico challenges his readers,

> Considering all this, let the masters of wisdom teach the young how to descend from the world of God and of minds into the world of nature in order to live a decent and just humanity in the world of nations. Which is to say that the academies, holding such principles and such a criterion of truth, should teach the young that it is the nature of the civil world, which is the world that has been made by men, to have just such matter and form as men themselves have.[397]

This, then, leads us to a third lesson. As 'masters of wisdom,' Vico would have social scientists concerned first and foremost with leading others to an understanding of themselves as inventors of the social world they inhabit. In contrast to the relativism that often characterizes constructivist notions of social reality, however, Vico's constructivism is justified with respect to an account of the true and transcendental structure of human nature and, as such, is characterized by responsibility. Responsible for the invention of the certainties that make up the social world, human beings' capacity for invention is, nonetheless, conditioned by a higher and eternal transcendental truth in which they participate. Whether we locate the source of this truth in the Judeo-Christian God, as Vico would, or in something else, our creativity is made possible only by virtue of the fact of a truth that contains us, and which we ourselves cannot contain. With the recognition of the creative activity of the faculties of MEMORIA, then, also comes humility and a responsibility to exercise our creativity in a way that both acknowledges and preserves the creativity of others. Unlike Nietzsche, with whom he shares so many affinities, Vico's *New Science* is characterized not by a will to power, but by a will to dialogue. For Vico, the distinctly human faculty of *ingenium* does not function in a vacuum, but rather as an activity that seeks to reconcile the differences between disparate terms through the invention of common points of agreement. Just as the process of navigating the social world demands that the individual use their memory and imagination to construct intelligible images for their *ingenium* to reconcile, so too does it involve encountering other people actively doing the same. Where differences arise, the

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[397] Vico, "Practic of the New Science," 428.

implication of Vico's account is that we resist the hubris that would cause us to forget our own humble relationship to truth and, instead, use our *ingenium* to forge common understandings with others in response to the demands of concrete situations. This is not a relativism, nor is it strictly a pragmatism. Instead, Vico's suggestion is of a constructive hermeneutic that understands the world through a process of creation that is never ossified, but always in humble relationship to others.

Paradoxically, then, Vico's constructivism is the product of a simultaneous claim to a true conception of human nature. This paradox at the heart of Vico's philosophy, however, is what ultimately sets him apart from the relativism that he warned would befall the Enlightenment faith in instrumental rationality. Instead of a constructivism of resignation, which, applying Reason to itself, confuses a lack of certainty with a kind of absolute solipsistic authority, Vico's is a constructivism of hope made possible by a coming to terms with the truth of human nature. Accepting the verity of one's nature as MEMORIA, the social construction of reality is transformed from a thing of anxiety to one of hope, not as a hopeless Sisyphean struggle to master the world, but rather as the natural activity of a self already known.

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